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ABSTRACT

This report serves as a resource on student achievement initiatives and offers a perspective or framework through which to view them. It is divided into five sections. Section 1 briefly explores the history of the current student-achievement movement and the issues surrounding it. Section 2 highlights the findings of the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) Student Achievement Survey. The survey was sent to a stratified random sample of 2,000 urban, suburban, and rural districts in 1997. The superintendent and the school board president each received a copy of the survey. A total of 955 superintendents (49 percent of those who received the survey) responded. Section 3 provides close-ups of eight districts and their student-achievement efforts. Section 4 summarizes many of the student-achievement profiles not included in the previous section. These descriptions provide the names of school districts, contact names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Section 5 lists resources school boards can use to build a knowledge base on student achievement. The report concludes with the NSBA's mission statement and a description of its vision. (Contains 16 figures.) (RT)

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Reaching for Excellence

What Local School Districts are Doing to Raise Student Achievement

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Reaching for Excellence

What Local School Districts are Doing to Raise Student Achievement

By Tibbett L. Speer

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Foreword

> Education is not to reform students or amuse them or to make them expert technicians. It is to unsettle their minds, widen their horizons, inflame their intellects. . . .
>
> *Robert M. Hutchins*

Schools should be about learning, and in spite of numerous reports and newspaper articles and television programs saying otherwise, thousands of schools nationwide are just that. This is because allowing students to achieve at their highest potential is the ultimate goal of the school boards governing these schools.

The board of directors of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) shares this goal and has made it a primary underpinning of the association's current and future programming. We have done so because we know that, regardless of public demands for higher student achievement, systemic change will not happen without school board leadership. Using their oversight, policy, and advocacy roles, local school boards must ask informed questions, align the district's resources to attain the desired outcomes, and ensure the school environment is one in which student achievement will flourish.

Recently NSBA published *Raising the Bar: A School Board Primer on Student Achievement* to give school boards the information they need to make the best decisions about raising student achievement and the strategies they can use to govern more effectively. The following pages offer glimpses of school districts that have put those principles into practice.

The basis for much of the information in this publication is a survey sent to a stratified random sample of 2,000 urban, suburban, and rural school districts nationwide. The survey asked superintendents, working with their board presidents, to respond to a series of questions about issues related to student achievement, including implementation of standards, alignment of standards with assessments, roadblocks encountered, and more. Among the survey's key findings were the following:

- The vast majority of districts are involved in making high academic performance a primary goal; urban schools (83 percent) are particularly focused on student achievement.
- School leaders believe that rigorous district academic standards are the most important factor for ensuring high academic performance. Whether the district or the state sets the bar, these leaders believe high expectations and support make a difference. By a margin of nearly three to one, they believe consequences are important for making standards work. Further, the majority (79 percent) offer help to students who fail to achieve standards.
- Survey respondents told us that the roadblocks for districts and communities committed to strengthening student learning included lack of parental involvement (68 percent); teacher resistance (67 percent); lack of funds (66 percent); and negative public perception of the schools (a great or moderate problem for 54 percent of districts).

- Districts are building local accountability for student achievement. Four out of five reported being involved within the past two years in providing systems that tracked and reported indicators of student achievement such as results on state assessments, dropout rates, and the success of district programs. Ninety percent of the districts in the survey reported that they were realigning their own assessments with state standards.

NSBA is committed to helping school boards across America raise the achievement levels of all their students. We are in it for the long haul and believe you and your fellow board members are, too. We hope this report will inspire, inform, and help you network with colleagues on the same journey to excellence.

Sincerely,

Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This publication serves as a resource on student achievement initiatives in this country and offers a perspective or framework through which to view them. School board members, administrators, and staff members will all find the publication useful. Overall, the publication is divided into five sections:

Section I briefly explores the history of the current student achievement movement and the issues that surround it.

Section II highlights the findings of NSBA's Student Achievement Survey, which used quantitative and descriptive methods to obtain information on districts' activities. The survey was sent to a stratified random sample of 2,000 urban, suburban, and rural districts and had a response rate of 48 percent.

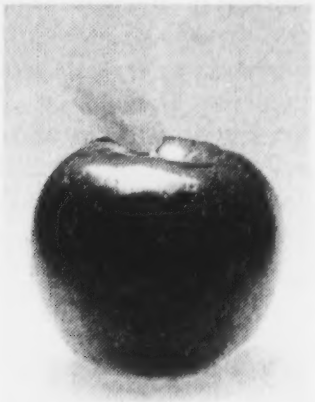
Section III provides close-ups of eight districts and their student achievement efforts. Some 224 districts submitted descriptions or profiles of their efforts; due to space limitations, we have featured eight of them in-depth to illustrate the kinds of approaches school districts have taken.

Section IV summarizes many of the student achievement profiles not included in the previous section. These brief descriptions provide the names of school districts as well as contact names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.

Section V lists resources school boards can use to build a knowledge base on student achievement.

SECTION I

Student Achievement: Past and Present



If children's test scores rose in proportion to the increase in the number of theories about student achievement, ours would be a nation of rocket scientists. Education roils with varied, often conflicting, views on how to improve academic success.

Fortunately for the youngsters — and for us — many programs prove their worth. They produce higher test scores, place more kids in rigorous courses, and increase the percentage of students who complete high school and go on to college. If only we could find one program that works for all!

Such a panacea does not exist, though. Our country is too big; our citizenry, too diverse. That does not mean we should not try. Indeed, President Clinton labels student achievement as the nation's top priority, a target so vital, it requires an American crusade. "No one has yet presented a compelling case to me that calculus is different in Chicago from Little Rock, Ark., or Cody, Wyo., or for that matter Germany or Singapore or any other place in the world," the President told students and educators last year during a speech in a high school field house in Northbrook, Ill.

Calculus isn't different. People are. Learning styles and social backgrounds are just two of many factors that make Student A grasp derivatives (or algebraic equations or addition and subtraction) at a different rate than Student B, or Classroom C vs. Classroom D, or Town E as opposed to Town F. Our challenge remains a local one. Each community must find programs that best serve its residents.

Our challenge remains a local one. Each community must find programs that best serve its residents.

We will explore some of these efforts later in this publication, but first, let's back up and see how student achievement became such a critical, end-of-the-millennium issue to America's President and people.

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Education at Risk

Few government reports grab the limelight the way *A Nation at Risk* did. Released in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, it presented a portrait of an educational system in trouble. Worse, in the eyes of many, it cast doubt on our ability to compete in the global marketplace. Suddenly, education was seen as something that affected every American, not just students and parents.

The report recommended that states raise graduation requirements for all students and prescribed a curriculum of "new basics" — that is, four years of English and three years each of math, science, and social studies.

Six years later, concerns were still high, and a national education summit was convened in 1989 at the University of Virginia. Led by President George Bush, the summit invited the nation's governors to meet and draw up a plan to improve our school systems. The group, including then-Governor Clinton, agreed on six (later to be eight) broad goals to be met by the year 2000. Two of the goals centered on student achievement:

- By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern society.
- By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

The "excellence movement," as it was dubbed, spurred a drive for a national system of standards and tests.

The "excellence movement," as it was dubbed, spurred a drive for a national system of standards and tests. Though fueled by a sense of urgency, the effort ran into opposition from a variety of groups and for a variety of reasons, including concerns that the government would dictate the content of the curriculum and interfere with parents' rights.

As the national standards movement was transformed to support state efforts, many states raised graduation requirements and reviewed core academic standards. Moreover, most states launched into standards drives of their own, issuing, along with them, assessments that prompted school districts to amend or align their standards and curricula.

In 1996, a second summit took place in Palisades, N.Y. This time, business played a more prominent role, as IBM Chairman Louis Gerstner cohosted the event with two governors. This summit focused on state standards and technology and promoted ways to help states measure their standards against others.

Spurred on by sound bites and summits, the public perceived student achievement as a priority and an issue that required the application of new as well as existing measures. Last year's Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll found that nearly three out of four Americans supported the use of national academic standards. They also said they would put a computer in every classroom and would have children start school at age 5 or earlier if it would help prepare them to learn. In addition, two out of three supported the use of standardized national tests to measure achieve-

ment. They also favored grouping children according to ability and creating a national curriculum. Only 20 percent believed that public schools are testing youngsters too much.

As this publication shows, this coast-to-coast fervor has had a positive effect. Today, good test scores, rising graduation rates, and successful community involvement programs abound in every region of this country. Hundreds of thousands of education supporters — education professionals, parents, small-business owners who care about neighborhood schools, and others — have devoted themselves to improving achievement.

But much remains to be done. Images of decaying urban schools, the distressing achievement gap between races and genders, and the concern about our students' performance in global competitions — those are all real, and, over time, these concerns erode the public's faith in local abilities to promote academic excellence. As this report was written, an incident occurred that illustrates this linkage.

Speaking to the National Council of Jewish Women, President Clinton challenged those who fail to demand more from public schools. "I do not believe these kids cannot learn," Clinton said. "I am tired of seeing children patronized because they happen to be poor or from different cultural backgrounds than the majority."

As the President spoke, results from a rigorous new international math and science exam filtered out. The next morning, a front-page headline in *The Washington Post* declared, "U.S. High School Seniors Rank Near Bottom."

But international tests often provide unreliable comparisons of students' abilities. Gaps between nations can be minuscule, and pools of test-takers differ from country to country. It's natural, however, for everyone to want to come out on top. Indeed, President Clinton visited Northbrook last year to praise local eighth-graders for doing just that.

Today, good test scores, rising graduation rates, and successful community involvement programs abound in every region of this country.

But in the latest example, about 10,000 randomly selected, high-achieving seniors from our public and private high schools scored near the bottom of 21 countries. It's a safe bet that most people who read the newspaper accounts did not pause to wonder about the test's reliability or the wisdom of interpreting it to mean that our schools are in jeopardy. Instead, they and our national leaders seized upon the results as the latest in a series of defeats for our education system. They focused on charts showing the United States trailing many European countries, and barely in front of Lithuania, Cyprus, and South Africa. "Unacceptable," said Education Secretary Richard Riley, as he urged local schools to establish tough academic standards.

Justly or not, our education system is scrutinized more critically, and by more people, than ever before. To retain local control, school districts must improve academics locally. Efforts must be research-based, coherent, and tailored to the needs of each community. Solutions will not appear quickly or easily, but whenever progress is made, districts must broadcast their success stories as widely as possible.

With every headline like *The Washington Post*'s, the credibility of local public school governance diminishes.

How Well Do Students Learn?

While the debate rages over how to help children learn, two other questions are equally contentious: How well are students learning now, and how has this changed from years past? Three indicators are often invoked to answer those questions: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), and course-taking trends among students.

According to data from NAEP, academic performance has hardly changed at all in 25 years.

According to data from NAEP, which periodically measures achievement of fourth, eighth, and 12th-graders, academic performance has hardly changed at all in 25 years. As the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., reported last year, NAEP results in science, math, reading, and writing were nearly the same in 1996 as they were in the 1970s. Different age groups, races, and genders have moved up or down — and gaps between groups remain disturbingly large — but as a whole, progress has been flat. In 1994, only one-third of 12th-graders demonstrated reading mastery, and only 11 percent showed a strong grasp of history. However, this test cannot reliably measure achievement below the state level, because too few students in any single district take it.

The public is more familiar with the SAT, but its interpretation requires caution as well. Since most high school seniors do not take the SAT, the exam cannot measure school excellence in general. Further, the SAT was designed as a "curriculum-free" aptitude test to predict college success.

In addition, for many years, only the very top students took this test. As higher education gained importance, though, the SAT has attracted more students — including increasing numbers from the middle and bottom of their classes. Thus, any downward trend in scores is not surprising.

According to an analysis from the Brookings Institution, any decline in SAT scores isn't a new phenomenon either. Indeed, SAT scores began to decline as early as the mid-1960s and hit bottom around 1980. According to Brookings, math scores dropped from a high of 502 in 1963 to a low of 466 in 1980. By 1995, though, they had bounced back to 482. Verbal scores, on the other hand, peaked in 1963 at 478. In the 1970s, they dropped into the 420s and have never recovered.

The good news, however, is that certain subsets of test-takers — groups made up of the same class rank, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and so on — actually are scoring higher. And while the proportion of high verbal scorers has dropped, record-breaking numbers of students achieve high scores in math. These positive trends deserve consideration along with overall scores.

A third indicator is the level of academic rigor our young people are experiencing. Today's students are taking tougher courses. From 1982 to 1994, the proportion of high school graduates enrolled in an academic program (rather than a vocational or general one) grew from 42.5 percent to 68.8 percent, according to Brookings. The proportion that had studied the new basics, plus two years of a foreign language, grew from 9.2 percent to 39 percent in that time. Education reformers point with justifiable pride to this development.

But they cannot rest there. The rigor and depth of courses also need to be evaluated. Despite current efforts, approximately one-third of college freshmen arrive on campus ill-prepared,

according to a study by the Southern Regional Education Board. These students must take at least one remedial course, be it math, writing, or reading, just so they can begin college studies with the rest of their classmates.

School boards across the nation should consider how America can do better by the 2.5 million young people who graduate from high school each year. In fact, every school board member reading this may want to reflect upon how to use the power of office to become more effective.

The following questions may help boards target where efforts are most urgently needed:

- If outsiders viewed this district's NAEP and SAT scores, what image of its schools and students would they receive? How has that image changed over time? Are all subsets of students showing improvement, or have some lost ground?
- According to these tests and others, how does this district compare with others in the state?
- What proportion of students sign up for college-track or Advanced Placement courses? How has that number changed?
- Are more students graduating?
- Where do graduates go? How well do they perform when they begin college, enter the workplace, or join the military?

Characteristics of Programs That Work

Successful student achievement initiatives feature several components. For one thing, they demand commitment from everyone connected with schools. School board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, community members — all must participate, and not necessarily in that order. The political climate today is conducive for such involvement, as the heightened media coverage of education in general and academics in particular suggests. Hardly a day goes by without a story in the media pertaining to student achievement.

The district profiles in this publication illustrate cities and small towns that have attracted the community support necessary to bring academic excellence into the classroom. These districts have found that the endeavor requires not only the enthusiastic endorsement from many constituents but school board leadership in at least four realms as well. These "four pillars of student achievement," as we call them, include:

- Setting a vision of education for schools;
- Establishing a successful learning environment that supports the vision;
- Exercising accountability for results; and
- Using advocacy to build support for the system among the community.

The survey analysis in Section II explains each of these realms in more detail. The most widely reported methods for improving student achievement involve standards and assessments. These relate to:
1) curriculum content, or the knowledge and skills taught to students at particular levels, and
2) performance, or students' mastery of the knowledge and skills.

Standards and assessments act as cornerstones of student achievement, perhaps because they require educators and the public to ask tough questions about education such as: What is quality education? What should students be expected to know? How well are our schools doing, and where do they need to improve?

States have already taken some action. Nearly every state has, or intends to have, its own standards. Many districts align their standards and assessments with their state's and supplement state standards with their own.

But aligning standards and assessments matters little unless the curriculum and textbooks reflect the same material and unless teachers are trained to teach the newly aligned courses.

But aligning standards and assessments matters little unless the curriculum and textbooks reflect the same material and unless teachers are trained to teach the newly aligned courses. Those teachers also must have high qualifications to begin with, and they must have access to ongoing professional development. Indeed, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, achievement differences between students often can be traced to differences in their teachers' expertise. Led by Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, the commission reports that enormous numbers of teachers hold only emergency or substandard licenses. Many others lack degrees in their field, particularly those who teach in schools with the highest minority enrollments. These schools, with students who most need expert instruction, often receive the newest teachers.

Standards and assessments alone will not work, though. Almost any measure that brings parents to school — the father as well as the mother — is likely to help student performance. For example, children are more likely to get good grades and less likely to repeat a grade or be expelled if their fathers are highly involved with their schools, a study from the U.S. Department of Education reported last year. Preschool programs serve multiple purposes, too. They engage children and families, prepare children to learn, and reveal learning problems that can be addressed immediately through early remediation.

Money, of course, is always an issue, but the relationship between money and academic performance remains controversial. Simply pouring money into schools, without changing the nature of their operations, does not work, says Eric Hanushek, a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Rochester. Hanushek cites figures that demonstrate a 70 percent increase in real spending per pupil between 1970 and 1990, a period in which student performance hardly changed, he says.

Almost any measure that brings parents to school — the father as well as the mother — is likely to help student performance.

Other experts, such as researcher Gerald Bracey, point out that most of the increased funds have gone toward special education and other programs that would not be expected to improve achievement. Harold Wenglinsky of the Educational Testing Service concludes that different money matters differently: spending on teacher-student ratios and central office administrators clearly affects student achievement, he says. While experts continue to provide insights on the use of funds, wise school boards will determine for themselves how their resources can best translate into student achievement.

Class size remains an issue as well. According to many advocates, small classes result in academic success as well as racial equity. Project STAR — a longitudinal study of more than 11,000 students in Tennessee — is an oft-cited example. The project clearly showed that pupils in small classes of 13 to 17 students achieved higher student outcomes and better behaviors than students in larger classes, even classes with a full-time instructional aide. Minority students benefited the most.

Technology is key too. Technology as a student achievement tool can give even the poorest districts a path to the world's information resources. Yet a computer's mere presence provides no guarantee that learning will occur. Teachers must be comfortable with computers and know how to integrate them into coursework, and students need sufficient access to the machines.

Board members intent on boosting achievement for all students might begin by asking themselves the following questions about their districts:

- Is an overall vision of education in place?
- Do short and long-range plans support the vision?
- What programs are yielding the greatest student achievement successes?
- What programs are providing mixed or unclear results?
- What is failing?
- In each case, why are those programs turning out the way they do?
- With the benefit of hindsight, could any past failures have been turned into successes?
- Could the mildly or wildly successful initiatives have brought even better results?
- How can the school board improve future outcomes?

SECTION II

NSBA's Student Achievement Survey

NSBA continues to target the enhancement of student achievement as a major objective of its programs and services, and it urges local school boards to do the same. This survey was conceived to help in that effort by gauging local school district leaders' perceptions about student achievement and providing profiles of district activities aimed at improving learning in the schools.

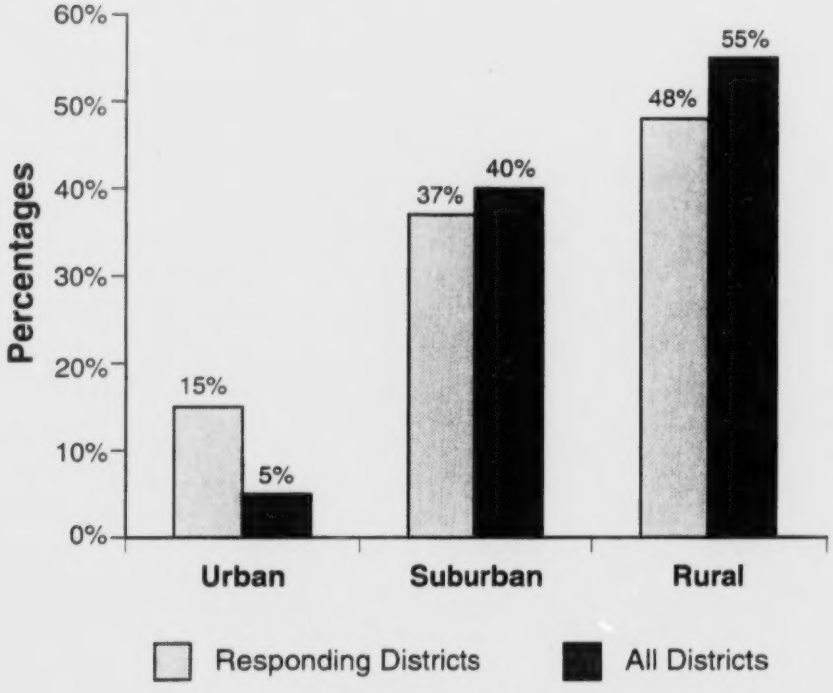
The survey was sent to 2,000 districts in 1997. Random selection, along with stratified (urban, suburban, and rural) sampling procedures, was used to produce the sample. Each district received two copies of the survey: one addressed to the superintendent and one to the school board president. The superintendent (in consultation with the board president) was asked to respond. A total of 955 superintendents (48 percent of those who received the survey) completed and returned the form. Of these respondents, 224 (24 percent) also described one or more student achievement programs that were in place and working.

The responding districts serve more than 6 million students — about 14 percent of America's schoolchildren. Approximately 15 percent of the districts describe themselves as urban, 37 percent as suburban, and 48 percent as rural. (See Figure 1.)

The enrollments of the responding districts cover a wide range as well — 36 percent have enrollments of up to 1,000 students; 40 percent have 1,001-5,000; 15 percent are in the range of 5,001-20,000; 5 percent reported enrollments of 20,001-40,000; and 3 percent have over 40,000 students.

As for district budgets, approximately half (53 percent) of respondents reported budgets of less than $10 million. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 1: Comparison of Responding Districts to Population

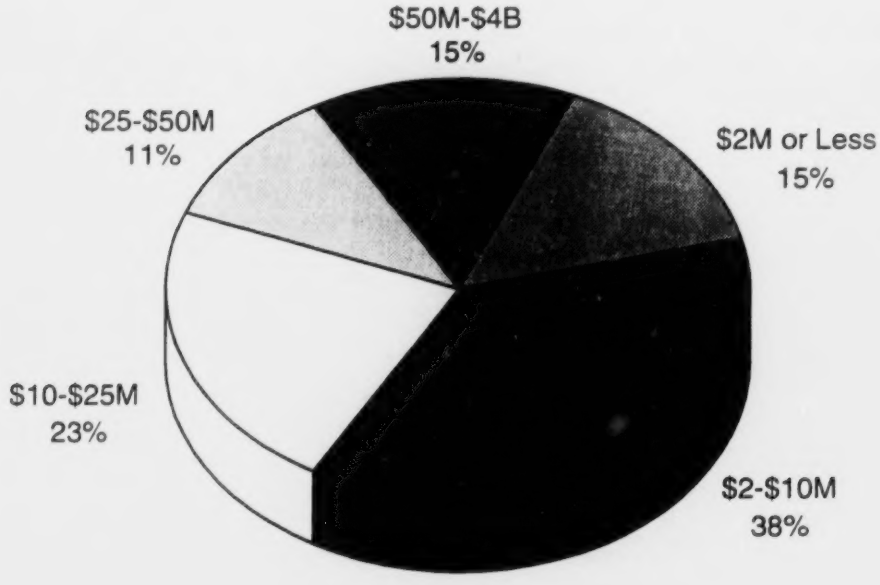


About the Survey

The survey elicited information about student achievement philosophies and endeavors as they pertained to each district. Superintendents, working with their school board presidents, were asked to:

- Rate factors on their contribution to student achievement.
- Evaluate district involvement with a variety of student achievement activities and issues.
- Specify their level of agreement with statements about the nature of state standards and assessments.
- Report on subject areas governed by district content and/or performance standards, and identify the driving forces behind the development and/or revision of district standards.
- Judge the impact of obstacles to student achievement.

Figure 2: Responding Districts' Budgets



Survey Results

Student achievement initiatives depend upon four related components, each of which is necessary to the success of the whole. In this framework, the school board plays the central role in establishing the district's educational vision along with members of the school community. The school board also supports the vision with an environment that encourages achievement and offers guidance, in the form of policies on the accountability measures needed to make sure all participants promote that vision. The school board also advocates for community and governmental support.

This publication analyzes the results of the survey in light of this framework. It is important to keep in mind that all topics are linked. The division into four categories is for discussion purposes only and does not imply that one is more important than another.

1. Vision

A district's vision of student achievement may incorporate several elements, including character and citizenship. However, a core component is academic excellence, and it is this component that is the focus of this publication.

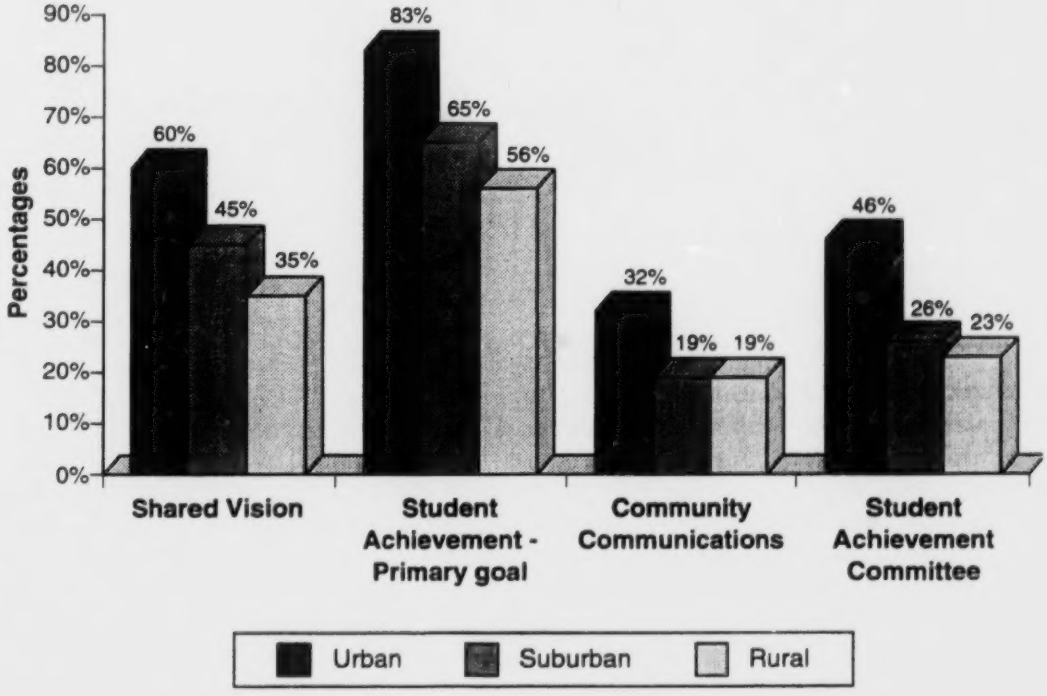
In response to the survey, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of the superintendents reported their districts were "greatly involved" in making high academic performance a primary goal. Fewer — 42 percent — were "greatly involved" in defining a shared vision of student achievement and engaging in activities to foster that vision. Overall, slightly over one-quarter (27 percent) of the districts that responded reported they were greatly engaged in establishing a committee or task force to study student achievement issues to ensure informed, research-based decision making.

Further, even among the districts "greatly involved" in making student achievement a primary goal, only 38 percent had established such a study group. Only 21 percent of superintendents reported their districts were greatly involved in establishing channels of communication with the community to discuss student achievement issues.

EXAMPLE: *The Fullerton (Calif.) Joint Union High School District offers what it believes to be an effective process for involving the community in comprehensive planning to establish a school community vision. Its biennial report, with goals and objectives, originated in 1983 after a special task force of parents, teachers, board members, and administrators established criteria for evaluating how well the district's schools were meeting instructional expectations. The board subsequently adopted 11 student achievement goals and 35 corresponding objectives and published the results. Over the years the district has reached out to the community to get input from all concerned about the quality of education, and it has published its biennial report and presented it to the public through the collective efforts of staff districtwide.*

As Figure 3 shows, more urban districts reported being engaged in defining a shared vision of student achievement, establishing high academic performance as a goal, and participating in supporting activities. Indeed, the differences were striking: Urban districts were almost twice as likely as suburban or rural districts to indicate great involvement in establishing community communication channels or in establishing formal bodies to study issues relating to student achievement. (Rural districts, of course, may engage in more informal planning, which can be effective in smaller communities.)

Figure 3: Percentage of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Districts Greatly Involved In Student Achievement Activities (Past Two Years)



Studies such as NAEP also may help explain why more urban districts report focusing on student achievement. The NAEP test, which assesses fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math and science, recently found that only 40 percent of students in urban public schools were meeting minimum standards in reading, math, and science. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of students in suburban or rural schools meet or go beyond basic competence levels, according to a 1998 report from *Education Week*. Urban schools may simply be under more public pressure to focus on achievement.

However, there is good news as well. As the report goes on to indicate, many urban schools are succeeding despite the odds. Courts and legislatures in some states are also pointing to successful urban schools and using these examples as a motivating force to link new public funds to improved achievement.

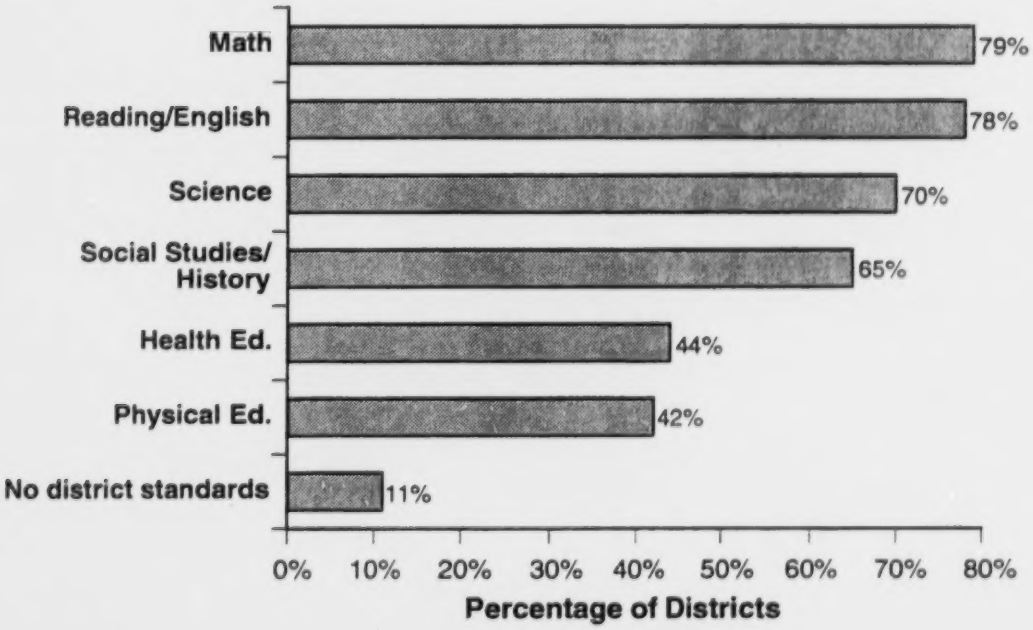
Questions to Consider

- Does my district have a shared student achievement vision and corresponding goals and objectives that result from that vision?
- Does the district have a strategic plan?
- What structures exist to ensure that informed, research-based decisions are made about student achievement?
- How does my district communicate with the community? What types of communication channels are used?

District Standards

Whether they are locally designed, state mandated, or nationally recommended, standards are used with aligned assessments to translate a district's student achievement vision into reality.

Figure 4: District Standards — Subject Areas



School leaders recognize this reality, and those responding to the NSBA survey indicated that having "rigorous district academic standards for all students" is the most important factor for ensuring high academic performance. Indeed, districts were nearly unanimous on this point, as reflected in an average rating of 3.8 (with four as "very important" and three as "important") assigned to locally designed or adapted standards. (Sixty-four percent of responding districts were in states with mandatory standards; 14 percent were in states with voluntary standards; and 11 percent were in states without standards. Eleven percent of respondents checked "other" or did not reply to the question.)

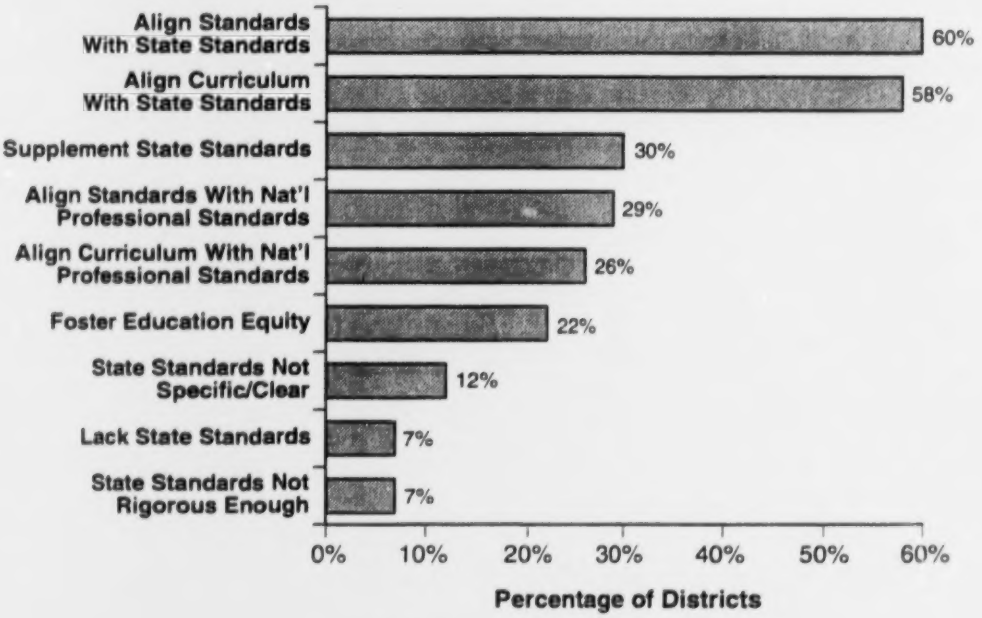
What do local standards look like? As Figure 4 shows, most districts have standards in one or more academic areas, with math and reading/English standards most prevalent (79 and 78 percent, respectively). About two-thirds or more have social studies/history and science standards.

Survey respondents indicated as well that a number of factors led them to create or revise their local standards in the past two years. For one thing, state standards exerted significant influence: 60 percent of districts reported developing or revising their standards to align them with the state's, and a similar proportion (58 percent) revised district standards to ensure their curriculum was aligned with state standards. At the same time, close to one-third (30 percent) cited the need to supplement the state's standards and used additional or revised district standards to make them more rigorous.

EXAMPLE: *Teachers in the Poland (N.Y.) Central School District led K-12 curriculum committees, using state assessment information to focus their curriculum alignment work.*

National standards, such as those endorsed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, also led some districts to revise/adopt district standards (29 percent) or to align their curriculums (26 percent).

Figure 5: Driving Forces Behind the Creation and/or Revision of District Standards (Past Two Years)



EXAMPLE: *Nicolet (Wisc.) High School participated in a four-district consortium that used a synthesis of national standards to develop a common set of exit standards and assessments for specific grade levels.*

As Figure 5 shows, school districts reported a variety of other motives for changing or adopting standards as well. Forty-one percent of urban districts, for example, cited educational equity as a reason for changing their standards. (By way of comparison, only 22 percent of suburban districts and 16 percent of rural districts were concerned with parity.) National professional standards were also more likely to stimulate action in urban districts: 42 percent of urban superintendents, compared to 32 percent of suburban and 21 percent of rural superintendents, cited national professional standards as an incentive to change or develop new district standards.

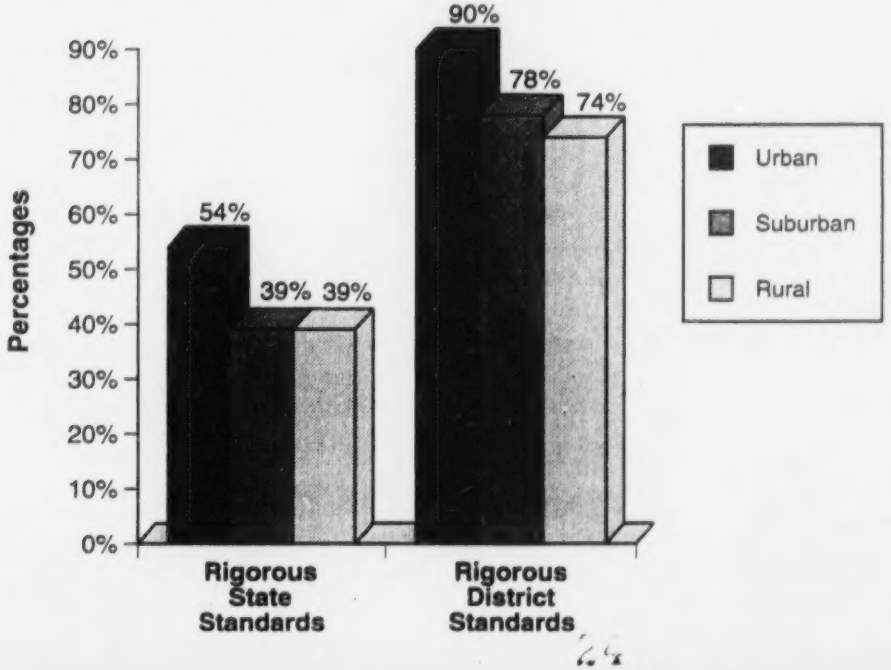
Questions to Consider

- In what areas does my district have standards?
- Should standards be developed for all subject areas?
- How do our standards compare to those of other districts and the state?
- How do our standards relate to ones endorsed by national organizations?
- Are our standards sufficiently rigorous?
- Is our curriculum aligned with district and state standards?

State Standards

While districts generally agree on the need for state and district standards, the degree of importance they attach to such standards varies somewhat. (See Figure 6.) For example, more than

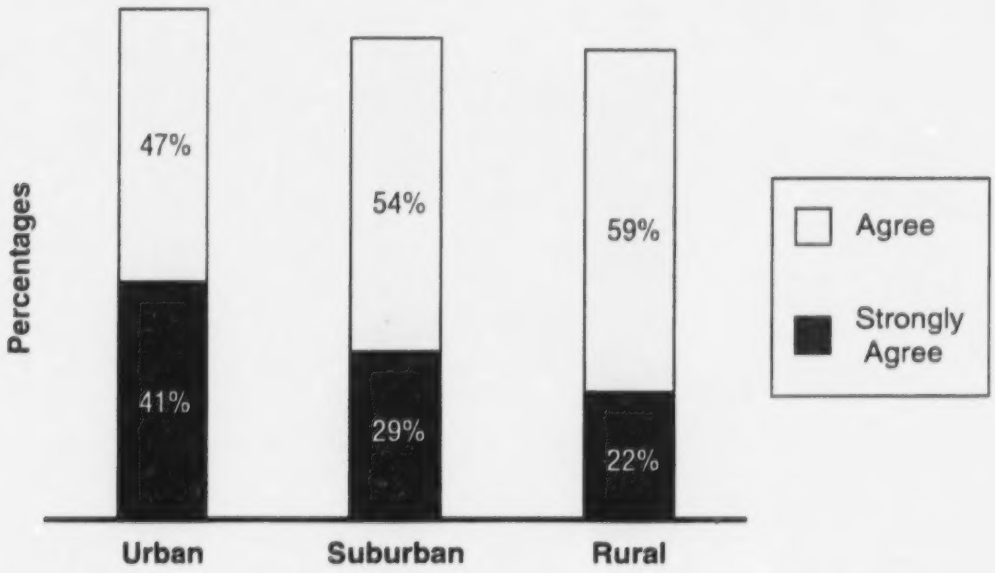
Figure 6: Percentage of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Districts Rating State and District Academic Standards as "Very Important" to Student Achievement



half of urban school leaders (54 percent) said rigorous state academic standards were very important, compared to 39 percent of school leaders in suburban and rural districts. Likewise, 90 percent of urban superintendents said rigorous district academic standards for all students were very important, while only 78 percent of their suburban and 74 percent of their rural counterparts expressed similar views.

When asked to rate state standards, many superintendents reported that state standards lacked clarity or specificity, a view held by nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of those responding. Rural superintendents (30 percent) were more than twice as likely as urban superintendents (12 percent) to say that state standards were not specific or clear. On the other hand, more than four-fifths of the respondents agreed their state standards were rigorous. Districts overwhelmingly agreed as well that their curriculums were aligned with state standards. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7: District Curriculums Aligned With State Standards (Urban, Surburban, and Rural "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" Ratings)



The vast majority (83 percent) of respondents also indicated district teachers are trained on the state standards to better help students measure up. In two-thirds of the districts, teachers were involved in actually developing the standards, according to respondents.

But should state standards have consequences for students who do not achieve them, such as not getting promoted or graduating? By a margin of nearly three to one, respondents said "Yes." Apparently, too, most districts make efforts to help students meet the standards; 79 percent said additional help is offered to students who fail to achieve the standards.

EXAMPLE: *High Point (N.J.) Regional High School offers supplemental enrichment, remedial labs, and after-school and lunch-period test preparation classes to help students meet standards.*

How does a board judge what is rigorous, and what benchmarks are available for comparisons? One option, "cooperation among states to provide benchmarks to compare and evaluate state standards," was viewed favorably by more than two-thirds of the respondents. Voluntary national standards as a basis for comparison were less popular, though, with slightly over half of respondents describing national standards as good benchmarks.

Questions to Consider

- Are our district and state standards rigorous and clear? What benchmarks are used to evaluate them?
- How do our standards and curriculum reflect the state's guidance and our own initiatives?
- What are appropriate student consequences for failure to meet standards?
- How informed are we about standards issues in other states and at the national level?
- What kind of help is available to students who are not achieving?

2. Environment

The link between a positive learning environment and student achievement cannot be overstated. For such an environment to exist, though, school boards must work to provide school administrators and teachers with sufficient resources, and they must recognize how resources are interrelated.

Our survey asked superintendents to evaluate 17 factors relating to academic performance on

Figure 8: Average Ratings for Student Achievement Factors
4=Very Important; 3=Important
2=Somewhat Important; 1=Not Important

Rigorous district academic standards for all students	3.76
Assessments that are aligned with standards	3.71
Teacher development that is aligned with standards	3.64
Early remediation for students	3.63
Parental involvement with students' school work	3.59
Accountability measures for teachers	3.50
Pre-school programs to prepare children to learn	3.24
Use of technology in the classroom	3.20
Accountability measures for school administrators	3.20
Rigorous state academic standards for all students	3.19
Greater district level flexibility to allocate resources	3.13
School board leadership on student achievement	3.11
Higher teacher qualifications	3.10
Greater school level flexibility to select/implement curriculum/programs	3.06
Smaller classes	3.01
Greater emphasis on student health and social needs	2.81
Accountability measures for school boards	2.74

a scale of one (not important) to four (very important). Figure 8 summarizes the responses. Some of the factors, such as "rigorous district academic standards for all students," were discussed in the previous section on vision because of their contribution to the process of setting vision, goals, and objectives. Others, such as accountability measures, will be discussed in one or more of the sections to follow on accountability and advocacy. The focus here is on operational factors—teachers, student programs, and other resources.

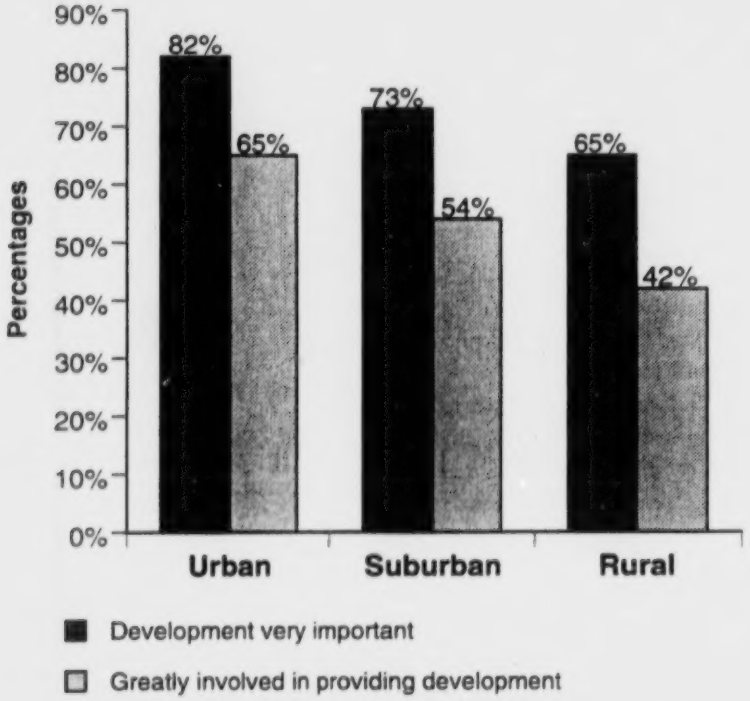
Teachers

Few people disagree that teachers are key to higher student achievement. National researchers such as Linda Darling-Hammond are concerned about the general level of qualifications of some of today's teachers. Their studies have shown that too many teachers are hired on "emergency" criteria or are assigned subjects other than the ones in which they have credentials. Often, too, beginning teachers or those with the least experience are given the toughest classes first, before they are ready.

Our respondents agree that having highly skilled teachers is important. In fact, "higher teacher qualifications" was rated 3.1 in the survey. Moreover, nearly one-third of respondents rated higher teaching qualifications — such as education, experience, and licensing — to be "very important" in promoting academic success. Urban superintendents were particularly vocal on this issue: 44 percent rated higher teacher qualifications as very important, compared to approximately one-third of their suburban and rural counterparts. Given that many urban districts have a tough time recruiting highly qualified teachers, it is no surprise to find this link to student achievement high on city school leaders' lists.

Survey respondents acknowledged, too, that even the best teachers need professional develop-

Figure 9: Importance of / Involvement in Teacher Professional Development



ment to maintain excellence, especially if they are working with new standards and assessments. In fact, respondents gave "teacher development that is aligned with standards" a rating of 3.64. However, more urban superintendents (82 percent) rated professional development on standards and methods for attaining the standards "very important" than did suburban (73 percent) or rural (65 percent) school leaders. At the same time, only half of all respondents said their districts have been "greatly involved" in providing professional development opportunities to help teachers raise student achievement in the last two years. (See Figure 9.)

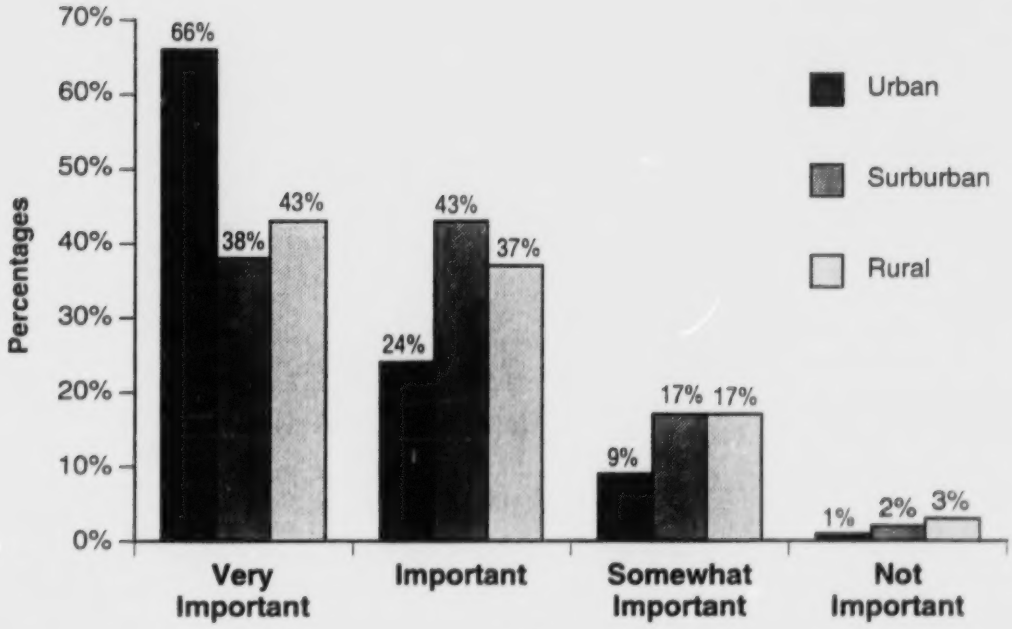
Finally, communication is clearly the key to successful management in any endeavor, and school operations are no exception. Forty percent of respondents reported their districts were "greatly involved" in establishing communication between teachers and administrators, and 47 percent were "involved" in this important activity.

EXAMPLE: *In Hillsboro (Ill.) Community Unit School District #3, teachers from each discipline and school level participate on a council to assess, coordinate, and evaluate the district's staff development. Noncertified staff, administrators, and parents are also represented on the council.*

Questions to Consider

- How does the district's teaching staff measure up in terms of education, experience, and licensing?
- What specific actions can the school board take to ensure that only the best teaching candidates are hired in the future?
- Are teacher professional development efforts aligned with standards requirements and other student achievement goals and objectives?

Figure 10: Importance of Preschool Programs (Urban, Suburban, Rural Comparisons)



- What is the quality of training offered to teachers? (Does it focus on depth of subject matter or enhancement of skills?) Are there incentives for teachers to pursue training? Are there mandates?
- What needs to be done to ensure that teachers participate in, and are enthusiastic about, student achievement initiatives?

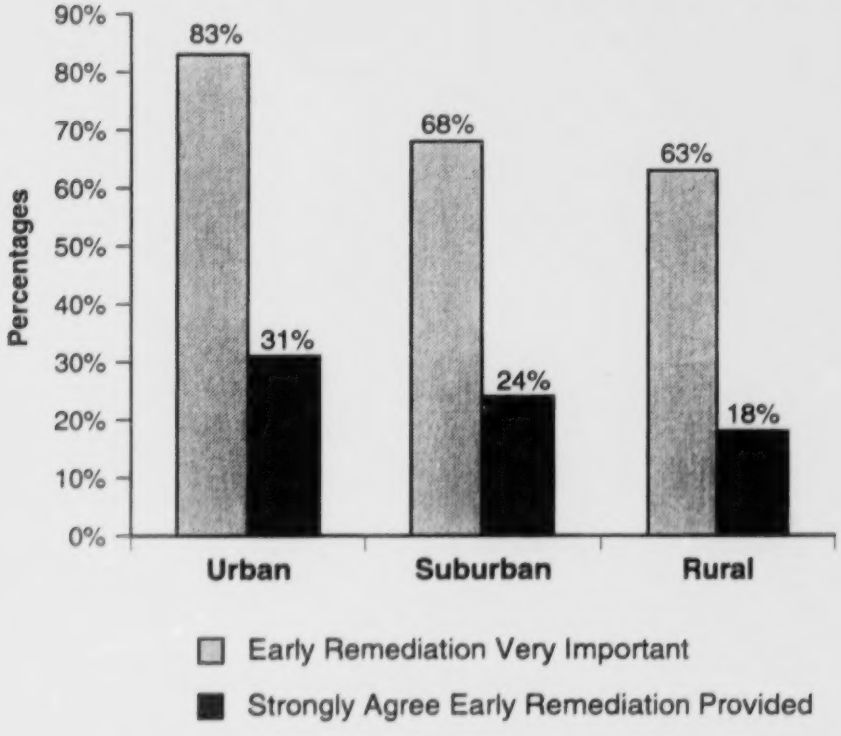
Student Programs

Setting off on the correct path is the best way to succeed on any journey. This is as true of academic achievement as it is of anything else. As this survey indicates, school districts across the country have found many paths to pursue.

Many districts, for example, report that preschool programs greatly benefit young children, regardless of the children's abilities. Average learners, slower learners, and gifted learners can all benefit from early preparation. In fact, survey respondents gave preschool programs a rating of 3.24 on a four-point scale.

Preschool benefits children from disadvantaged backgrounds; thus, the programs are particularly important from the perspective of urban districts, which serve large numbers of these students. This is clear from Figure 10, which shows that two-thirds of all urban respondents believe preschool programs are "very important" for later student success.

Figure 11: Early Remediation for Students (Urban, Suburban, and Rural Comparisons)



Preschool classes also can give non-English speakers the boost they need to start kindergarten or first grade on a firmer footing. Youngsters whose parents have not read to them, or encouraged them to experiment with numbers or the alphabet, may desperately need a chance to catch up.

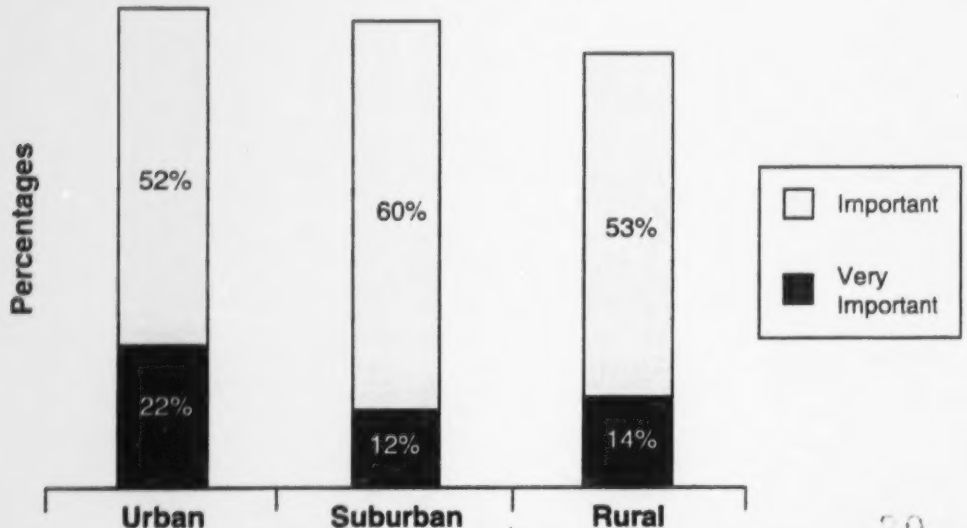
EXAMPLE: *Districts that attempt to identify children who might need a preschool program to catch up with their peers may find that diplomacy is required to reach or engage their families. The Shelby (Mich.) Public Schools circumvents that problem by distributing early learning kits to all children who will be entering kindergarten. Families are provided plastic tubs containing scissors, crayons, a coloring book, pencil and paper, alphabet chart, Go Fish cards, and a flip-chart with school readiness activities that can be useful to any family, especially those with limited English or literacy skills.*

Respondents also agreed on the importance of early remediation programs for children who fall behind, giving such programs a rating of 3.63 on the four-point scale. As with preschool programs in general, urban superintendents were more likely to rate such programs as essential, and probably for the same reasons.

As Figure 11 shows, however, while more than four-fifths of urban district leaders believe early remediation is very important, less than one-third strongly agreed that students who do not meet state standards were receiving additional help. Similar discrepancies are found in suburban and rural districts.

EXAMPLE: *The Dade County (Fla.) Public Schools offer a research-based preschool, whole-day kindergarten, and beginning reading programs for 90 minutes per day. The ultimate goal is to keep students performing on grade level and to minimize retention, while avoiding dependence on long-term special services such as special education classes. One-on-one tutors spot problems early, and the district's family support services increase parental involvement and work on home-based problems.*

Figure 12: Student Health and Social Needs (Urban, Suburban, and Rural "Very Important" and "Important" Ratings)



Though not rated as highly as other concerns, programs that address children's health and social needs are also important, survey respondents indicated. Specifically, respondents rated "greater emphasis on student health and social needs" at 2.81 on the four-point scale, a relatively low rating among the topics listed. Urban school leaders felt this need the most: 22 percent saw this emphasis as "very important." Twelve percent of suburban districts and 14 percent of rural districts agreed. Despite the lower rating, the majority of urban and rural superintendents acknowledged that student health and social needs were a moderate or great problem in their districts.

Significantly, a growing body of evidence demonstrates the benefits to student learning of addressing health issues. Those benefits include educational outcomes such as grades and standardized test scores as well as student behaviors and attitudes that impact on educational outcomes. The questions for schools are to what extent schools should be responsible for assisting families and communities in addressing students' health needs and how schools can collaborate with others to meet those needs in the context of their educational mission.

Questions to Consider

- What preschool programs are available in the district?
- What types of preschool programs are most effective and under what circumstances?
- How comprehensive should preschool programs be? What criteria should be used to determine who should participate, and what provisions need to be made for reaching preschool candidates?
- How aggressively does the district seek to identify students who require remediation or students who are gifted?
- How effective are early remediation programs? Are problems identified before they become severe? How have retention rates and special education class enrollments changed over time?
- Are there financial advantages to addressing achievement problems before they become severe?
- What are the physical, mental, and social health needs of students that are interfering with their ability to benefit from the educational program?
- How can a school board work with the community's public and private agencies to address students' health needs that are interfering with their ability to achieve academically?

Other Resources

It is a rare—perhaps nonexistent—district that is satisfied with the amount of money at its disposal. There always are more staff members who are needed, and better textbooks and newer equipment in which to invest. Of all the "roadblocks" to student achievement, our respondents rated lack of funds as among the most serious. Funding, along with other issues, is discussed in greater detail later in this report under the heading "Advocacy."

Once we accept that funds are limited, however, we then face the prospect of allocating what is there. In this regard, districts enjoy an enormous range of possibilities as they align resources with student achievement initiatives.

Incorporating technology into the curriculum is one such alternative. If used effectively, under the direction of teachers who themselves are comfortable with it, technology can help students achieve and provide them with exposure to the tools they will one day use in the workplace. Slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of the superintendents who responded viewed technology in the classroom as "very important," half rated it "important," 14 percent rated it "somewhat important," and just 1 percent replied it was "not important." These ratings averaged, overall, 3.2 on the four-point scale.

Smaller class size rated somewhat lower, at 3.0. Many districts view low class sizes as an alluring, yet elusive goal, as more and more students crowd through schoolhouse doors. The distribution of responses — 29 percent rated smaller classes as "very important;" 45 percent as "important," 23 percent as "somewhat important," and 2 percent as "not important" — may reflect the lack of consensus among education researchers on the subject. Because of limited resources, it might make more sense to reduce class size selectively — at certain grade levels, for example, or with certain types of instruction — instead of trying to reduce class size across the board.

EXAMPLE: *The Franklin (Tenn.) Special School District allows for closer student-teacher interaction by beginning its academic year with 20 or fewer pupils in each primary grade classroom.*

Most troubling, perhaps, is the fact that at least half of the superintendents who responded to this survey reported that lack of information on programs that boost student achievement was a roadblock to their own efforts to institute effective practices and to align scarce resources.

Questions to Consider

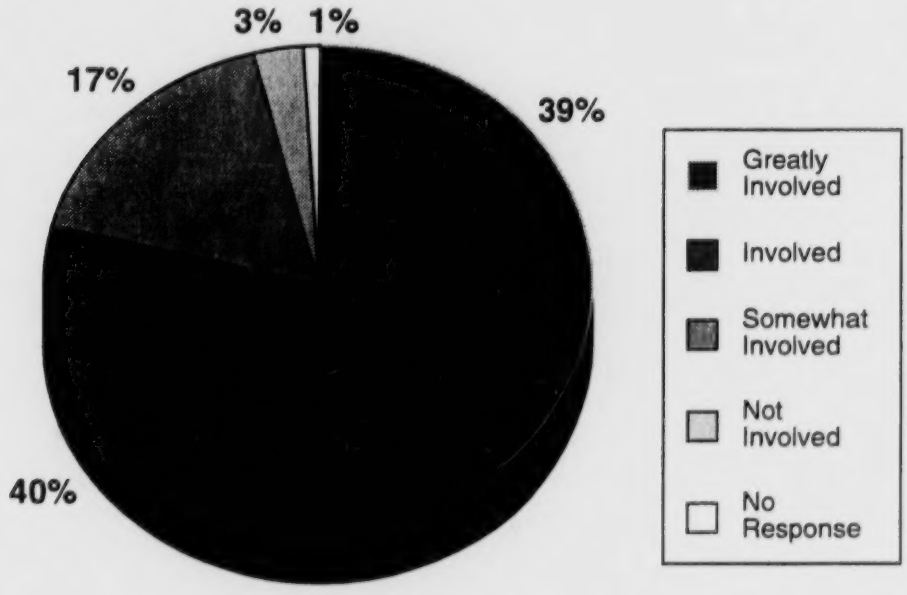
- Does our district habitually blame lack of funds for low test scores or other indicators of poor student achievement?
- How can greater scholastic success be fostered with the funds that are available?
- What plans exist for the integration of technology into classrooms?
- How is technology used to enhance classroom instruction? Is it used to present students with higher-order thinking problems and challenging computer simulations? Does it provide teachers with rapid feedback on student performance?
- What is our average class size? How does it compare to class size in similar districts?
- Under what circumstances do smaller classes have the greatest impact on student achievement?

3. Accountability

Student achievement requires skillful, dedicated participation from everyone. Good intentions are not enough. Neither are rigorous academic standards alone. School leaders must develop methods for holding programs and people accountable.

The purpose of accountability systems, whether state or local, is to provide the public with systematic reports on key performance indicators. A system is most informative if these indicators are linked to student achievement goals and objectives and if methods of comparison are documented.

Figure 13: Provide Local Accountability System (Past 2 Years)



According to a recent survey from the Council of Chief State School Officers, 40 states currently provide one such measure of accountability: school-level report cards for the public. Local school boards should go a step further and provide leadership to establish local accountability systems. In addition to meeting the growing demand for accountability, such systems present districts with opportunities to go beyond state summaries and provide their communities with more in-depth information. Local accountability systems can provide information on strategic plans, short- and long-range goals and objectives, and corresponding data on student performance. Low-performing schools can document improvement on goals, objectives, and indicators as well, and schools that meet state performance standards can report on plans for continuous improvement.

Local accountability systems appear to be spreading: 39 percent of superintendents said that in the last two years their districts were "greatly involved" in providing systems that tracked and reported indicators of student achievement, such as state assessment results, dropout rates, and the success of district programs. (See Figure 13.)

More urban districts (57 percent) were "greatly involved" in building local accountability than were suburban (41 percent) or rural (33 percent) districts. Another two-fifths of the districts reported they were "involved" in such enterprises.

Assessments

Some critics complain that assessments, particularly state assessments, divert too much attention from schools' daily operations. They worry that teachers "teach to the test" and nothing more. Clearly, assessments require enormous time and resources. Still, survey respondents seem to believe the results are worthwhile. Seventy-three percent of the superintendents attached great importance to "assessments that measure standards and provide feedback to help

students." The remaining respondents said assessments are important or somewhat important, with urban superintendents believing more strongly than their suburban or rural counterparts that such measures were needed.

The vast majority of districts, in fact, are currently realigning their assessments with state standards. In only 8 percent of the districts did the superintendent report no attempts to align assessments and standards in the past two years.

Figure 14: Superintendent and School Board Understanding of State Assessments (Summary of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Differences)

Superintendent: I am confident I understand what the state student assessment test(s) conducted in my district measure

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do Not Know
Urban	44%	41%	12%	2%	1%
Suburban	26%	52%	15%	4%	3%
Rural	20%	54%	21%	4%	2%

Superintendent: I am confident I understand how the state student assessment test(s) conducted in my district measure student achievement

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do Not Know
Urban	43%	43%	12%	1%	1%
Suburban	24%	51%	17%	5%	2%
Rural	19%	55%	21%	3%	3%

School Board President: I am confident my board understands what the state student assessment tests(s) conducted in the district measure

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do Not Know
Urban	22%	49%	23%	3%	3%
Suburban	9%	48%	31%	7%	6%
Rural	6%	41%	37%	10%	7%

School Board President: I am confident my board understands how the state student assessment tests(s) conducted in the district measure student achievement

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do Not Know
Urban	21%	47%	26%	4%	3%
Suburban	9%	49%	30%	6%	6%
Rural	6%	41%	36%	10%	7%

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Are local school board presidents and their superintendents confident that they understand the what and how of state achievement tests given in their districts? The majority said they are. Some interesting differences in confidence levels among superintendents and their boards are shown in Figure 14, though. Specifically, urban leaders were more likely than suburban and rural leaders to "strongly agree" they were knowledgeable about state assessments.

Questions to Consider

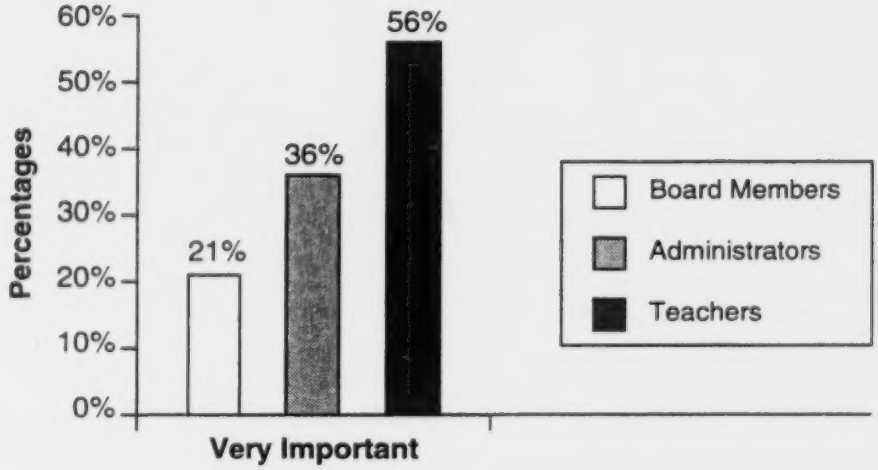
- How does the district measure student achievement? What indicators are used, and do they provide information that is needed for decision making and planning?
- Is a local accountability system in place? What indicators are used and reported to the public? Do channels exist for public feedback?
- How thoroughly do we understand state assessments?
- How can we use assessments to improve student achievement?
- How well do our district assessments reflect district and state standards?

Holding Board Members, Administrators, and Teachers Accountable

Communities entrust school boards with the oversight and leadership of their schools. Thus, school board members bear ultimate responsibility for student achievement. Committed to boosting academic performance at all levels in the district, board members make policy and work with administrators who are responsible for implementation.

Given this role, would holding school boards accountable for raising student achievement lead to higher student learning? Few superintendents thought so. Indeed, only 21 percent indicated such measures were "very important" to raising student achievement, and the aggregate rating of this variable was the lowest of the 17 factors asked about in the survey. Local accountability methods may need to become more widespread, but boards face the ultimate accountability measure already — public opinion and the ballot box.

Figure 15: Importance of Accountability to Student Achievement



Staff accountability is often easier to identify and evaluate because of the staff's instructional responsibilities. In addition, research supports the link between activities in the classroom and how well children are learning. Thus, it should be no surprise that superintendents marked accountability measures for administrators and teachers as more important than similar indicators for board members, as shown in Figure 15.

EXAMPLE: *In the LaPorte (Texas) Independent School District, administrators report quarterly on their progress in achieving measurable goals assigned to them by the board of trustees and the superintendent. Their reports must include concrete data, often in written form. This information helps the board conduct regular evaluations of the superintendent.*

Indeed, 65 percent of urban superintendents, 51 percent of suburban, and 58 percent of rural superintendents said that lack of strong teacher accountability measures was a "great" or "moderate" problem in their districts.

Example: *The Bethpage (N.Y.) Union Free School District rigorously evaluates its teachers. Probationary teachers are "observed" at least twice each semester and evaluated twice a year. Nontenured part-timers are observed at least once per semester and evaluated annually. Tenured teachers have their choice of being observed at least annually and evaluated annually, or of taking part in peer coaching, a personal growth plan, action research, or a teacher portfolio. Every April the board convenes a special meeting devoted to reviewing observations and evaluations of all tenure-eligible staff.*

EXAMPLE: *Though student accountability was not specifically cited in the survey, Paradise School District, Texas, offers an interesting program. Its student responsibility program requires every student to hand in all assignments in a timely manner. A grade of 80 percent or better is expected on all work assigned. Students failing to meet a deadline or to receive a passing grade face considerable, specific consequences.*

Questions to Consider

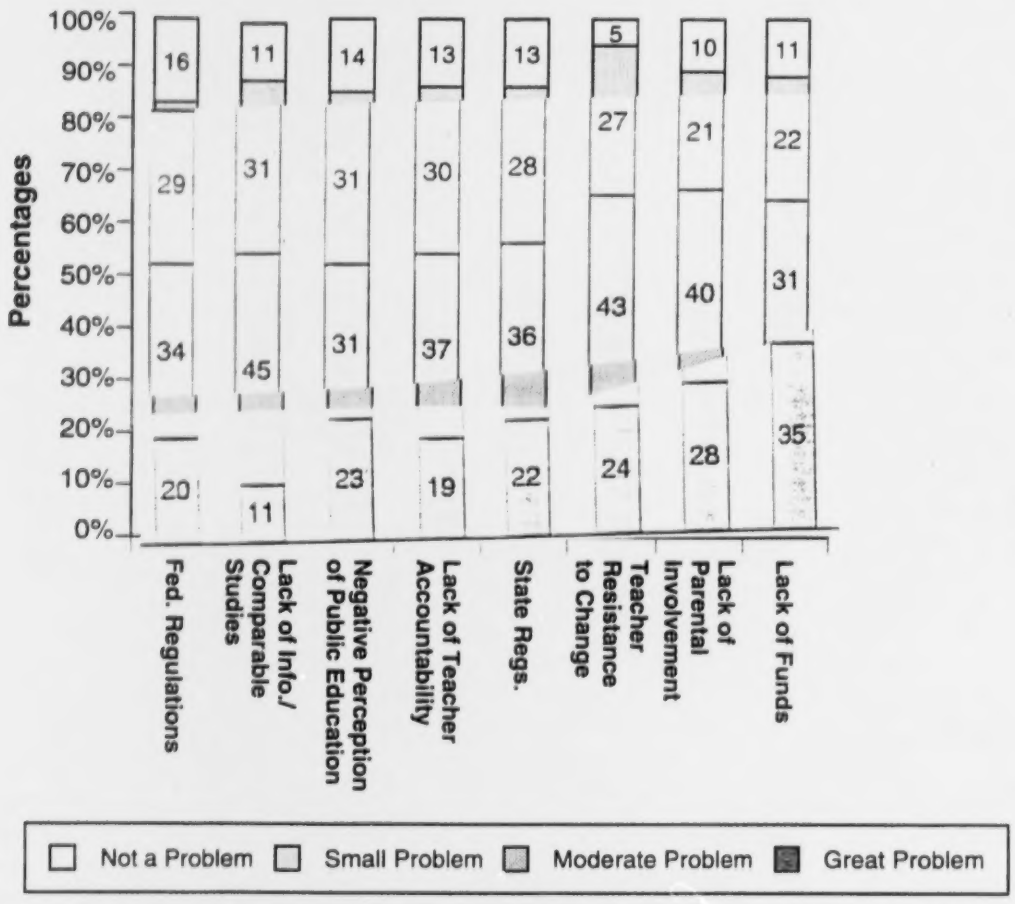
- How should school boards be held accountable for their performance? Which indicators should be used?
- Which accountability measures and indicators are used for administrators and teachers?
- How do accountability measures align with student achievement goals and objectives?
- How are students held accountable for their academic performance and behavior?

4. Advocacy

To be effective advocates, school boards and school administrators must share a vision and be willing to lead others in pursuit of that vision. The demand for leadership is growing. Indeed, concerns about the quality of public education are widespread and are fueling demands for greater involvement and accountability. Survey respondents agreed that school board leadership is "important" to ensure high academic performance in their districts. On a scale of one to four, where four equals "very important" and three "important," board leadership received an average rating of 3.1.

Figure 16: Roadblocks to Student Achievement

(Note: "No Response" Rate is Approx. 1-2%)



An important element of advocacy is removing real or potential roadblocks to achieving the community's vision for the schools. Our survey looked at 15 factors that could have a negative impact on district efforts to raise student achievement.

First and foremost, effective advocacy requires reaching out to and including concerned publics in discussions and decisions about the public schools. School boards must engage citizens as well as professional organizations and their members and political and business leaders. Apathy or actual resistance from groups can stymie the best-planned initiatives. Often, too, school boards may find themselves seeking alliances at more than one level — local, state, and national.

Roadblocks are not uncommon in the districts responding to our survey (although many have begun programs to remove the obstacles or lessen their impact). Figure 16 provides a picture of respondents' perception of the prevalence of these roadblocks. At a glance, at least half of responding superintendents reported that negative public perception of the schools (54 percent), lack of parental involvement (68 percent), and teacher resistance (67 percent) were "great" or "moderate problems." Administrator resistance is apparently no more than a "small problem" in most districts overall. Urban superintendents, however, do report that administrators can be reluctant to change — and that such reluctance is problematic.

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Establishing effective communication can often overcome such differences and obstacles, though. Nearly one-quarter (21 percent) of the superintendents in our survey reported they had been "greatly involved" with establishing channels of communication with the community to discuss student achievement issues in the last two years. A like number indicated they were "greatly involved" in creating programs or opportunities to increase parental involvement.

Not surprisingly, the majority of superintendents view lack of funds as a roadblock to enhanced student achievement. Specifically, among responding superintendents, 66 percent describe "lack of funds" as a "great" or "moderate" problem. Questions that need to be asked include: How well are resources aligned with student achievement goals and objectives? Do programs contribute to the learning environment (that is, are they effective)? Are accountability measures in place to determine the effectiveness of programs over time? What advocacy efforts are needed to involve stakeholders to achieve desired funding levels? Again, school boards and superintendents need to explore the issues of advocacy at different levels and in partnership with other organizations.

Obtaining greater regulatory flexibility is another area where advocacy is important. Indeed, the majority of superintendents cited state and federal regulations as problematic and said that flexibility in allocating resources at the district level was "important" or "very important." (Nearly four out of five superintendents made these observations.)

EXAMPLE: *The survey did not gather statistical information on teacher involvement in developing vision statements, objectives, or assessments. The Starpoint (N.Y.) Central School District uses "teacher leaders" or "bottom-up leadership" as the basis for instructional initiatives and school improvement plans. Teacher representatives from each elementary grade level and from each department serve with administrators on a special council. The council conducts the district's needs assessment and subsequently prioritizes the findings.*

Questions to Consider

- Have roadblocks to student achievement initiatives been anticipated and incorporated into short- and long-term plans?
- Do advocacy efforts need to go beyond the district level?
- Which organizations or groups should be included in advocacy efforts?
- Are there areas in which advocacy leadership is lacking?
- How have different groups reacted to the changes required of them, and what lessons have their reactions taught us?

SECTION III

Eight District Profiles

School districts have taken many approaches to student achievement. Districts of all sizes and demographics face different challenges. The following profiles provide an in-depth look at eight districts with outstanding initiatives. From Connecticut to California, these districts were selected not just on success measures — some initiatives are too new to show specific results — but on their originality, potential interest to others, and representation of one or more of the components of this report's framework for success — vision, environment, accountability, and advocacy.

1. **ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA**
   Vision: Math Standards and Assessments
   Urban; 18,000 Students
   Contact: Carolyn Smith, (703) 358-6135

Like good mathematicians, leaders of the Arlington Public Schools mathematics program apply logic and intuition to problems relating to student achievement. The problems, which also challenge districts across the nation, are these: How can teachers be sure they are fully covering all state standards, and, as in Arlington's case, the district's even more rigorous ones? How can teachers retain flexibility while adhering to specific standards? Perhaps most important, how can schools in a very diverse district (41 percent white, 31 percent Hispanic, 17 percent black, and 10 percent Asian/Pacific Islander) demonstrate a student's mathematics mastery — or lack of mastery — to parents?

Arlington's solution, as mathematics supervisor Carolyn Smith explains, involves a three-pronged approach that is clear, concise, and constantly undergoing improvement. The key components are checklists of objectives, "checkups" of math problems, and summer review sheets.

"We are expecting more of youngsters as far as their understanding of math concepts than we ever have," Smith says. In fact, many concepts have been "pushed down" an entire grade. Some

material that used to be taught in fourth grade, for example, now must be covered in third.

The district adopted its current textbooks, kindergarten through calculus, in 1993-1994. In June 1995, the state issued its latest standards of learning, including six strands for mathematics. A few months later, Arlington's curriculum came out. The math component of this new curriculum reflected every applicable state standard, and more.

To clarify for teachers what they were expected to cover in class, district staff provide single-page checklists that itemize the content at each grade/course level strand by strand. Teachers also receive a set of 36 single-sheet "checkups," which contain four or five math problems, each requiring students to master one or more objectives for that grade/course level. The math problems, along with their objectives, were not handed down from "on high." The teachers themselves wrote them under the leadership of mathematics specialist Patricia Robertson. The checkups are so flexible that teachers can distribute them as in-class assignments or work out one problem a day in class. Some teachers send the checkups home for students to work on with their parents. However they choose to implement them, teachers use the checkups in whatever sequence they wish.

Teachers finally have specific evidence they can point to when explaining to parents why a child needs summer school or some other remedial program.

"It's very important that students learn as they go along," Smith says. "But I'd hate to see the time when we tell teachers that on such-and-such a day, the class should be working on such-and-such a problem. That's not teaching; that's just delivering material."

The district also put together a list of all the math problems on the checkups and their objectives. A teacher who wants to assign a problem based on an objective covered that day in class simply consults the list to find appropriate problems, ranging from the simple to the most difficult.

Parents and principals have praised these easy-to-use, easy-to-understand materials. In addition, teachers finally have specific evidence they can point to when explaining to parents why a child needs summer school or some other remedial program.

Parents play an important role in the third key component of the district's plan. Every year, math teachers receive a summer review packet to send home with their students. Prefaced by a letter (in English or Spanish) explaining how important it is to promote a child's interest in math over the summer, the packet contains 10 pages of 10 problems each, which students and families work on together.

In April 1998, Arlington's third, fifth, and eighth-grade students were scheduled to take state-level mathematics assessments for the first time. Students in three high school courses were to take the exam as well. The district expects the results of those tests to shed light on how thoroughly the district curriculum and its teachers are covering each mathematics objective.

At that point, Smith says, everyone will be held accountable. Within a few years, too, accreditation will hinge upon assessment results.

2. **DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DES MOINES, IOWA**
Accountability: District and School Improvement
Urban; 31,000 Students
Contact: Don Prine, (515) 242-7884; prinedo@dmps.des-moines.k12.ia.us

School districts grow and mature just as the students they teach do. The Des Moines Public Schools system is no exception.

Several years ago, Des Moines launched its first efforts at district and school improvement planning. Today, the district's improvement planning system is as sophisticated as any in the country. Student achievement commands primary importance. Objectives, targets, and goals revolve around the words "All students can and must learn."

"When we look at our reason for existing, we see that it has to be that way," says Don Prine, director for school improvement.

As part of the only state in the nation without state-imposed standards, Des Moines places utmost importance upon its own curriculum and criterion-referenced tests. Administered periodically or at year-end, these tests measure objectives that teachers are responsible for teaching. Through the use of data disaggregation, or, in other words, analysis of responses to individual test questions, it becomes apparent where program revisions are needed. "We have a great commitment to data-based decision making here in Des Moines," Prine says.

Even more critical is the dialogue about that data, Prine says. In fact, dialogue flows freely at meetings of the district's strategic planning committee, a 50-member group that includes board members, teachers, principals, parents, students, and community leaders. This group creates the annual district improvement plan, a document containing three targets and a strategy for reaching each of them.

Individual schools in the district also put together yearly improvement plans, which must contain at least one of the district targets, plus others of their own.

As in past years, the first of this year's targets calls for helping 80 percent of students to achieve at least 70 percent mastery by the year 2000 on all district criterion-referenced assessments in reading, math, language arts, social sciences, sciences, foreign languages, and vocational subjects. The second target, which calls for specific mastery achievements at various grade levels on the district composition assessment, will be adjusted next year, Prine says, as the district changes the grade levels at which it gives the tests. The third target, a school-to-work system for students in prekindergarten through 12th grade, absorbs the most energy at the moment, as it is the newest target and requires extensive interplay among the local business community, parents, and school leaders.

Individual schools in the district also put together yearly improvement plans, which must contain at least one of the district targets, plus others of their own. Early school improvement plans sometimes included seven or eight targets, Prine says. But experience taught principals to stick to two or three to focus more closely on the primary objective, student achievement. "The concern that every test score has a name and a face with it is something that prompts our greatest discussion," Prine says.

Des Moines is slowly approaching its target of having 80 percent of students achieve 70 percent mastery on criterion-referenced tests. Between 1992-1993 and 1995-1996 (the most recent year for which data are available), the number of elementary students to reach 70 percent mastery dropped from 77 to 76 percent. The number of middle school students achieving mastery climbed from 48 percent to 68 percent, though, and high school achievers grew from 34 per-

cent to 53 percent. The district will continue to allocate resources (people, time, materials, and money) to reading or whatever subject areas are most in need, and, again, the district will make those decisions based on the data. Meanwhile, Prine advises districts that are about to embark on similar improvement programs to expect stellar results, but not overnight.

"Folks need to be tolerant of ambiguity and of one another," he says. "This doesn't always fall exactly into place. Sometimes we measure our successes in very small increments."

3. MAPLE HEIGHTS CITY SCHOOLS, MAPLE HEIGHTS, OHIO

Advocacy: Parental Involvement
Suburban; 3,683 Students
Contact: Lucille Esposito, (216) 587-3200

When samples of its new parent/student workbooks "disappeared" into the hands of admiring teachers from nearby areas, Maple Heights City Schools could hardly take offense. The trio of booklets represents a breakthrough in the district's effort to persuade parents to participate in its programs.

"You have to have the parent, the teacher, and the student to [have] success," explains Lucille Esposito, the district's director of instruction. "Our research indicated that, besides intervention in the classroom, we needed one more component — the parent."

The district attempted to harness parents' energies through a booklet aimed at helping them help their children prepare for the state proficiency test.

Located on the edge of Cleveland, Maple Heights receives many student transfers from the city. Minorities make up about 60 percent of the student body. After the Ohio Proficiency Tests were introduced in 1991, Maple Heights students did so poorly the state eventually designated the school system as an "intervention district," one of 121 such districts in the state, according to Esposito. As such they were eligible for federal Goals 2000 money for use in promoting student achievement.

Using those funds, Maple Heights realigned its curriculum to cover more thoroughly the materials contained in the state assessment, targeted at grades four, six, and nine. It provided staff development and launched a summer intervention program. Teachers volunteered to return to school in the evenings to tutor youngsters and work with parents who wanted to learn how to help their children with schoolwork. At parent nights, Esposito explained how parents needed to do more than ask their children if school had been fun that day. They needed to be involved in academics.

The district attempted to harness parents' energies through a booklet aimed at helping them help their children prepare for the state proficiency test. The booklet was distributed to eighth-graders at the end of the year, and students were supposed to complete the booklet over the summer and bring it back to class in the fall. Out of about 500 students who received the book, two returned it, Esposito says.

Renewing its commitment to make parental involvement work, the district tapped its Goals 2000 grant to revamp the booklet. This time, teachers contributed their best assignments, which were compiled into eye-catching, spiral-bound booklets, one each for the fourth, sixth, and ninth-grade tests. The booklets feature convenient page tabs allowing users to turn instantly to whatever subject they choose: writing, reading, mathematics, citizenship, and science.

Along with the booklets, teachers sent home letters to parents and checklists with spaces for the date the assignment was completed and the parent's signature. The idea was that for several months before the state test, parents would assist the child weekly with a sequential assignment in the book, then sign the book to verify that they had done so. The child would then return the book to class, where the teacher would cover the appropriate lesson. The book would then go back home to be used in the next lesson.

The books caught on so well that more than 100 parents paid $5 each for extra copies. Students are not penalized if their parents do not sign the assignments, but the majority of eligible parents do participate. In one school, the principal obtained commitments from every sixth-grade parent to use the book.

It's too soon to tell how helpful the books will be. The first students to use them took the state test in March 1998. There is no question, however, that this district is on the right track. Since 1994, ninth-grade test scores on math climbed from 34 percent to 55 percent passing proficiency. (The state goal is 75 percent.) In that time, too, reading scores improved from 70 percent to 86 percent; writing, 58 percent to 82 percent; and citizenship, 52 percent to 76 percent. Comparable figures for science tests, which are the newest, are not available.

"We can never rest on our laurels," concludes Esposito. "The Ohio Proficiency Test was a wake-up call."

4. CLOUDCROFT MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS, CLOUDCROFT, NEW MEXICO

Environment: Reading
Rural; 586 Students
Contact: Donna McGee, (505) 682-2820

When she rummaged through a school closet and hauled out the box of computerized reading tests, fourth-grade teacher Charlie Cooper launched a hugely successful student achievement project. In the process, library circulation shot up 400 percent, a welcome reflection of the fact that Cloudcroft students crave books as though they were candy.

"Some of our second-graders have already read and taken tests on 77 books," Cooper says. "How many second-graders do you know who have read 77 books?"

Cloudcroft's schools are nestled in a scenic mountain community outside a military base. Students in the Cloudcroft Elementary-Middle School traditionally perform well on assessments, Cooper explains, but district leaders worried that they were not reading enough. Basal textbooks offered excerpts of great literature, but teachers wanted to encourage students to tackle entire works as well. Two question then arose: Which books? And who decides?

Basal textbooks offered excerpts of great literature, but teachers wanted to encourage students to tackle entire works as well.

To supplement the basal texts, the school invested about $1,000 three years ago in the Accelerated Reader program. This series of computer diskettes contains short multiple-choice tests for thousands of books. Initially, the district purchased 500 books, but these books sat in the closet for a couple of months until Cooper and colleagues fished them out.

The school had approximately one computer for every three classrooms. Teachers in the beginning told students to find any books in the school library that matched those on the diskettes, then read them and take the tests. The computer recorded which books the students read and how well they scored.

The children's enthusiastic response pleased their teachers. Later, though, a remedial reading assistant, funded through federal grant money, attended a workshop of the Reading Renaissance program. The assistant returned to Cloudcroft brimming with ideas. Cooper and other colleagues subsequently obtained their own grants to attend Reading Renaissance.

The program taught them many things, including that if they provided 60 minutes of reading time every day, their students could gain two years of reading skills in one year. To free up time, Cooper stopped teaching geography as a separate subject (blending it with social studies instead) and stopped lecturing on reading skills. Teachers also fine-tuned their use of the computerized tests. Library books were labeled with exact "reading zone" levels, measurements of their difficulty for students. As students took the tests, the computer calculated their individual reading levels so that teachers could steer them to appropriate books. If a student scored exceedingly well in one zone, the teacher knew that a shift to the next was needed. Students with poor scores received extra help.

Today, Cloudcroft students, who now may choose from 2,000 books, accumulate points based upon each book's length and difficulty, and trade these points in at the school store for pencils, paper, posters, balls, jump ropes, basketballs, dolls, and other toys. They also receive privileges based on their points, such as serving as Friday morning library assistant or principal of the day.

The first test designed to measure students' progress against state-mandated benchmarks was to take place in March 1998. But Cooper has already used another test to measure her students' reading progress and has found that in six months they gained one year's worth of skills.

That finding, plus the 400 percent increase in library circulation, convinces this district that its investment in reading has been worthwhile.

5. ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

Accountability: Assessment
Suburban; 73,400 Students
Contact: Joan Briscoe, (410) 222-1635

The first time around, the state-mandated assessment caught many Maryland schools off-guard. The West Annapolis Elementary School was no exception. Its students performed poorly in all areas. Barely one-third displayed overall passing proficiency.

It wasn't until afterward that the state provided the instructional model that represented the key to assessment success. This little school, located near the U.S. Naval Academy, seized upon that model. Today, five years later, its students' composite test scores have risen 39 points, hovering just under the state's 70 percent target.

"This has required intensive planning," says Principal Joan Briscoe. "Most of all, it required extensive changes in the classroom."

Administered to every third and fifth-grader in Maryland, the state's school performance assessment program measures higher-level thinking skills in reading, writing, social studies, science, and math. Based on assessment results, schools in the Anne Arundel district form annual improvement plans that target their weaknesses.

The magic formula for West Annapolis and its sister schools has been to make sure teachers are delivering "performance-based instruction" in all subjects. This approach to instruction, the state's recipe for higher assessment scores, requires youngsters to participate more dynamically in class than ever before. In science, for example, they analyze experiments and fill in data charts they design themselves. (In the past, such charts would have been provided to them.) Instead of answering multiple-choice questions, math students work on open-ended problems that can be solved in several different ways. Language arts teachers who used to ask, "How did that story end?" now ask students to write other endings based on the one they have just read.

"We're requiring students to be risk-takers," Briscoe says. "That's the way the real world is."

Dramatic shifts in organizational behavior don't come easily, though. West Annapolis faced resistance at first from several quarters, most important among them, the teachers, who were uncomfortable with the new requirements. Doubters became enthusiasts, however, when given sufficient professional development and the opportunity to learn new teaching strategies. As scores rose, the state awarded money, and the teachers were allowed to determine how to spend it. New reading programs, rulers, calculators, and geometry tools were long-awaited resources that rewarded teachers (and students) for excellent work.

Funds have remained scarce, of course, forcing West Annapolis to focus on only two areas of improvement at a time. Reading and writing came first and took the form of an all-subject effort in which even physical education instructors and music and art teachers have taken part. Parents have, too.

Today, instead of hosting bake sales, parents are in classrooms helping kids read.

In a school with a 30 percent mobility rate, parental involvement is an elusive goal. The new emphasis on student achievement has served, unexpectedly, as an inducement to parents. About one-third of parents participate in school life, Briscoe estimates, and that number has remained about the same over the years. Today, however, instead of hosting bake sales, parents are in classrooms helping kids read. Parents thus serve a more valuable purpose, and the school's 232 students benefit more directly.

The next round of assessments was scheduled to take place in May 1998. In the meantime, West Annapolis is fine-tuning its program, adding, for example, an economics component to social studies classes. The school also remains committed to performance-based instruction. The administration and staff will continue to target instruction to meet the standards in identified areas. Still, teachers and staff accept the fact that the days of dramatic jumps in test scores may be over. That is the nature of student achievement.

"It takes a more intense look to see what we're lacking," Briscoe explains. "It was global before. Now it's as though we need a magnifying glass."

6. **CORPUS CHRISTI INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS**
Vision: Standards
Urban; 41,327 Students
Contact: Sandra Lanier-Lerma, (512) 886-9012; sandral@intcomm.net

"No large school district has pushed the envelope the way this city has." So wrote *USA Today* in a 1997 article about the districtwide system of standards in the Corpus Christi Independent School District.

Academic standards that are clear, precise, and universally enforced permeate every activity, every aspect, of this low-wealth district's existence.

Like everything else in Texas, this crusade is on a grand scale. Academic standards that are clear, precise, and universally enforced permeate every activity, every aspect, of this low-wealth district's existence.

It wasn't always this way. A few years ago, employers complained that high school graduates lacked basic skills. More than half the graduates who enrolled in a community college were taking at least one remedial course. "Like most districts, ours didn't state clearly what the expectations were, either for students to learn, or teachers to teach," says Sandra Lanier-Lerma, assistant superintendent for instruction and operations.

In 1993, growing concerns led to a massive overhaul of district practices that eventually involved more than 1,500 educators, business leaders, university officials, parents, and school trustees. Together these leaders hammered out a detailed list of what students at all 57 regular campuses should know and be able to do at each grade level and for each course. These "real world academic standards," more rigorous than the state's, itemized content and performance standards in each PK-12 core-curriculum area. They revolutionized the way Corpus Christi students get their education. On the state assessment in the past two years, the percentage of students meeting minimum expectations in reading has climbed from 72 to 85; in math, from 52 to 64; and in writing, from 86 to 89.

The standards mean that all first-year biology students, for example, are exposed to the same material. To a great extent, too, the standards mean that an A is an A is an A. Students who receive A's (or B's or other letter grades) will have mastered the same material, and to the same degree, as all others who receive the same grade in the same course.

Every three weeks, parents receive progress reports that highlight which standards, if any, their children have trouble grasping. A revised report card, to be used for the first time this year, spells out similar information. "When the parent gets it, it shows exactly where the student is having trouble," explains Lanier-Lerma. Such reports are important in a district that has slapped an ironclad ban on social promotion. Students who don't achieve standards don't go on to the next grade. Period.

At the beginning of a new school year, teachers receive reports on their incoming students that show exactly their level of success on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Frequent assessments of all students also make early intervention possible. Students who lag behind are clustered for tutoring sessions according to the standard that challenges them. Summer school has been revised, too, so that students attend just long enough to pass the standards they have failed.

When requirements stand out so clearly, accountability is easier to enforce. Every employee's job evaluation depends, in some way, on student achievement, and the district produces charts and graphs of each school's performance. Teams of teachers and district representatives also visit every school to study its written plan and interview staff as to how the plan is working. Principals who fall short will be given suggestions.

"Sometimes educators lose sight of why they have the jobs they have," Lanier-Lerma says. "The board here identifies its expectations very clearly."

The district encountered some resistance to its standards campaign, but the fact that teachers played such a central role in the plan ensured its success. The role played by Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra was also important. A Corpus Christi native, and a graduate of local public schools, Saavedra understood where improvements needed to be made.

7. VOLUNTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT, VOLUNTOWN, CONNECTICUT

Accountability: Teacher Accountability
Rural; 485 Students
Contact: Joan Gardner, (860) 376-2325

Teacher accountability and professional development are at the center of the Voluntown School District's approach to student achievement.

"We believe good teaching translates into student learning," says Joan Gardner, a fifth-grade teacher at Voluntown Elementary School.

Gardner, a teacher with 20 years experience, serves as liaison to a state program aimed at helping new teachers become great teachers. The BEST Program (Beginning Educator Support and Training) started in 1989 when Connecticut tried to increase teacher salaries and accountability at the same time. A key ingredient was the use of mentors to help new teachers feel their way through new jobs.

Once they have been matched with new teachers, mentors meet with their new colleagues weekly to monitor, empathize, and guide.

Teachers who want to be mentors apply to their local professional development committee. "Even though we all know each other here, and we all eat lunch together, we still follow that [procedure]," Gardner says of the 28-teacher district. Those selected as mentors almost always are long-time professionals, but, as Gardner points out, that doesn't necessarily mean "ancient." One mentor in her school has taught for just five years.

Once they have been matched with new teachers, mentors meet with their new colleagues weekly to monitor, empathize, and guide. As the time approaches for the visit from state assessors who will evaluate the new teachers, mentors help their partners prepare. Assessors use objectives in Connecticut's competency instrument to evaluate the newcomers' skills. To prepare for those visits, mentors review the list of objectives that will be used, and even role-play a classroom setting, sometimes assuming the role of a misbehaving student to help the new teacher practice responses.

In 1996, the state expanded the BEST program from one year to two. As part of the new program, mentors help new teachers prepare a state-required portfolio that includes lesson plans,

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student work samples, and a videotaped class session. The process teaches the mentors about their work, too. Voluntown requires all new teachers to participate, in the interests of universal excellence.

The program's key drawback, Gardner says, is money. The state provides districts with $200 per new teacher to cover some of the costs of video production and substitute teachers. Voluntown, in turn, shows its commitment by compensating mentors above the state level. Districts in general still grapple with expenses and complications that come from releasing teachers to serve as assessors in other districts.

Superior teachers and a curriculum aligned to state standards combine to boost Voluntown test scores year after year. A few years ago, only 7 percent of sixth-graders reached the state goal on its writing assessment, Gardner says. In 1996, 46 percent did. Last year, 52 percent did. Between 1996 and 1997, successful sixth-grade test-takers in math rose from 43 percent to 65 percent; in reading, scores rose from 49 percent to 63 percent.

The key is expecting more and demanding more and giving teachers support

Rewarded with state grants, Voluntown set up a professional library for teachers that contains books, videos, and computer software. Students as well as teachers benefit from this district's forward-thinking approach to technology. The elementary school has at least three computers in each classroom. For the last five years, too, the school has offered a computer lab along with a full-time computer teacher who sees each student one week out of every three. Teachers also apply for mini-grants to incorporate technology into their classes.

Always seeking to improve, Voluntown tries to attract outside speakers to help teachers develop fresh approaches to their profession. The difficulty comes from being so small and remote. But even this obstacle has been surmounted on at least one occasion, Gardner says. Voluntown simply teamed up with another rural school.

8. **KERN UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT, BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA**
   Vision: Standards
   Urban; 26,000 Students
   Contact: Tom Jones, (805) 827-3154; tjones@khsd.k12.ca.us

Convinced that students in the middle often get overlooked, the Kern Union High School District decided to focus on average students, those scoring between the 25th and 65th percentile on the state achievement test. As a result of its award-winning experiment, called Project 2000, "average" students became anything but.

"The key is expecting more and demanding more and giving teachers support," says Richard Padgett, a high school testing director and Title I coordinator. Padgett served as Project 2000 coordinator at Arvin High School, one of four high schools selected for the program.

A local car dealer and a former district superintendent raised more than $1.5 million for this program, which began in 1989, and the district matched the money. In a nutshell, Project 2000 involved the selection of 100 incoming ninth-graders who would receive special attention for the next two years. Four successive cohorts, each with 100 youngsters, have followed.

To select participants, Project 2000 leaders gathered teachers from feeder schools and encour-

aged them to speak frankly about individual students. "We said, 'Say anything you want. This is confidential,'" Padgett recalls.

As a result of these sessions, the district was able to identify a good crop of youngsters with cooperative natures and average academic performance, many of whose families were migrant farmworkers. For the next two years, these students were kept together, all taking the same academic-track courses from the same teachers. To give teachers more time to work with these students, the district whittled their class load from five classes to four and their class sizes from 30 to 25. The extra class period was to be used for interdisciplinary sharing about every student in the program. All other duties, such as substituting, were removed.

"High school teachers tend not to talk to each other," Padgett explains. "Here we had social studies talking to English, who was talking to algebra, and all getting information from the counselor."

The students received extra access to computers and guidance counseling. Perhaps most important, they benefited from a special curriculum, written just for them.

After two years in Project 2000, students returned to the regular college preparatory program, and teachers and administrators held their breaths. How would these "average" students fare?

The results made the wait worthwhile. Students who participated in Project 2000 made better grades than other average students, even though they took tougher courses. Indeed, students in the first and second groups (1993 and 1994) were about four times more likely to complete high school than their non-Project 2000 counterparts. In terms of going to college, no differences were found between Project 2000 graduates and other average students the first year. But three times as many of the 1994 graduates applied for state university admission, and four times as many were admitted.

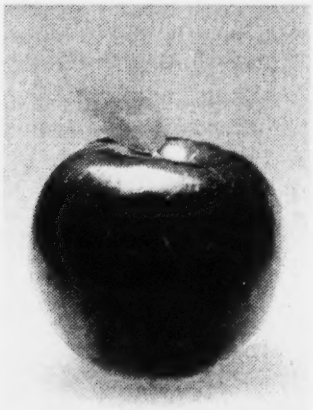
District leaders also point with pride to the fact that many students outside the program enrolled in more demanding courses than would have been expected. Project 2000 apparently affected them as well.

A weak link has been parental involvement. Project 2000 parents signed contracts agreeing to support studying at home and to attend meetings at school, but many failed to keep their promises. Padgett blames that failure on background differences rather than lack of interest, though. Non-English speakers who pick grapes or carrots for a living often feel intimidated in school settings, he says, not to mention being exhausted after a day in the fields.

Still, when word of this special program spread, many parents asked for their other children to be included in later years. As for the Bakersfield community as a whole, its enthusiasm shines through in the form of strong financial backing, newspaper editorial support, and continued district board commitment to the program.

SECTION IV

Other Student Achievement Programs



This section describes student achievement programs that school districts are using to boost scholastic success. The descriptions are divided along the lines of the report itself — that is, by vision, environment, accountability, and advocacy — with some subheadings included in each. Many programs could easily have been placed in more than one category or subheading, corroborating the premise of this document: that successful student achievement programs involve multiple aspects.

Many profiles were submitted, but, due to space limitations, not all could be included. The district themselves supplied the information on which these descriptions are based, along with contact information.

VISION: STANDARDS, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

1. Planning

In Wichita, Kan., strategic planning, goals, and assessments have improved student achievement, even though many Wichita students receive free or reduced-price lunches, have limited English proficiency, or require special education. In fact, the district has been able to narrow the achievement gap between student populations.

Specifically, process flowcharts keep plans on track in Wichita, and strategies are evaluated in terms of their importance to goal attainment. The MAT 7 assessment provides three-year trends with disaggregated information; the Kansas state assessment is used to track two-to-four-year trends. Scattergrams correlate high-poverty schools with low-poverty schools, and in the Elementary Disaggregation Summary, the sample chart reflects increases in achievement — and decreases in the achievement gap — by grade and student.

Wichita Unified School District 259, Kansas
Claradine Johnson, (316) 833-4000

The Goals and Objectives Biennial Report originated in 1983 after parents, teachers, board members, and administrators established criteria to evaluate performance in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District. In 1988-1989, the board adopted seven district goals and identified 87 objectives and corresponding performance standards. Goal 1 (Student Programs and Academic Achievement) and Goal 2 (Student Attendance and Behavior) carry a weight of 51 percent. The other five goals support the first two.

The reports are presented to the public through the collective efforts of staff districtwide. Considerable energy is invested in reporting and monitoring. The biennial report has enabled the district to establish school and district priorities and to bring instruction, operations, and service practices into alignment with expectations. The report serves as a model school accountability program.

Fullerton Joint Union High School District, California
Contact: Ken Stichter, (714) 671-4346

The Comer school development program emphasizes school-based mental health services, parent involvement, and teacher involvement in restructuring school programs. Nine components are essential: no-fault decision making (principle), consensus decision making (principle), collaboration (principle), parent involvement program (mechanism), school planning management team (mechanism), mental health team (mechanism), a comprehensive school plan (operation), staff development (operation), and assessment and modification (operation).

Central to this model is a school management and governance team composed of the principal, teachers, parents, a mental health specialist, and support staff, which develops the school's master plan. Instructional programs typically include a focus program, a small-group pullout tutorial, and a discovery room. In principle, this model can be adapted to diverse local curricula.

Dade County School District, Florida
Contact: Geneva Woodard, (305) 995-1908

The mission of the Cincinnati Public Schools is to educate all students to meet or exceed the district's defined academic standards. Strategic goals for 1996-2001 include: all students meet or exceed high academic standards; all schools are safe and orderly learning environments; all employees are focused on satisfying the needs of students and customers — parents, taxpayers, and others. The strategic plan incorporates specific plans, timelines, and annual targets.

Cincinnati School District, Ohio
Contact: Kathleen Ware, (513) 475-4803; warekat@edub.cpsboe.k12.oh.us

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In the Starpoint (N.Y.) Central School District, an "instructional council" has become a centerpiece of improved achievement. The council consists of a teacher representative from each elementary grade level and from each department, as well as an administrator from each building and central office division. This group conducted a districtwide needs

assessment in the form of a written survey followed by staff focus groups. The council prioritized the information, and the document now serves as the focus for all instructional initiatives and a backbone of the school improvement plan. Among the features of the approach: an integrated instructional system between special education and regular education.

Starpoint Central School District, New York
Contact: Robert Olczak, (716) 625-7272; rolczak@erie.wnyric.org

2. Standards

In the San Diego Unified School District, students graduating in the spring were required to earn a 2.0 grade point average (GPA). There was much apprehension that many students would fail, but teachers, parents, principals, and students worked very hard. The result: A larger percentage of students — 96 percent — met the 2.0 GPA than met the 1.5 GPA a year before. Clearly, high expectations and support make a difference.

San Diego Unified School District, California
Contact: Alan D. Bersin, (619) 293-8418

The board of the Hillsborough County Public Schools adopted the seven goals established by Blueprint 2000 (Florida's system of school improvement and accountability) in 1992. Efforts to achieve these goals have been made through school improvement plans. Progress is yet to be determined. The accomplishment of Goal 2 is the ultimate aim of the school system. Goal 2 states that "students graduate and are prepared to enter the workforce and post secondary education." The successful completion of the present Florida requirements for a high school diploma does not guarantee that graduates will achieve this goal.

The recommended plan calls for: revised graduation standards and achievement benchmarks for grades two, five, and eight; review of graduation standards and benchmarks by a committee that includes appropriate school-based and district personnel, university personnel, and representatives from the community and Vision and Goals Task Force; approval of standards and benchmarks by the superintendent's staff and the board; end-of-the-year assessment; and school and district personnel use of data to develop education plans for individual students and the school.

The process will be repeated each year. During the transition, students will be allowed to graduate and move ahead in grades under the present plan. Eventually, though, standards and benchmarks will be a determining factor in promotion and graduation.

Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida
Contact: Kenneth Otero, (813) 272-4432

A four-district consortium, the Nicolet Area Consortium, has been formed to develop a common set of exit standards for eighth grade. The consortium is using its Goals 2000 funds to: define a common set of academic standards for eighth grade; develop common assessment procedures; and establish a process for systemic change that will support the development of connecting benchmarks and assessments at prior grade levels.

The consortium formed a project coordinating committee that includes curriculum specialists from each district and department chairs from the high school. In addition to the coordinators, four area curriculum committees will develop eighth-grade standards and assessments. Curriculum committee members are being trained to work in their own districts to develop benchmarks and assessments at earlier grade levels.

Standards implementation will take four years. The consortium has contracted with the Mid-continent Regional Education Laboratory for technical assistance and training. All stakeholders will be involved in interviewing and refining this enterprise.

Nicolet High School District, Wisconsin
Contact: Marsha Davis, (414) 351-7577; Marsha_Davis@Nicolet.k12.wi.us

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Southwood Elementary School prides itself in having a unified staff that is "committed to excellence." The curriculum emphasizes the Michigan educational assessment program testing objectives. The presentation of objectives at different levels ensures the continuity of reading, mathematics, science, and writing.

The Kentwood Public Schools curriculum department wrote standards that correspond with the Michigan state board of education standards. Monthly districtwide curriculum meetings provided grade-level discussion and planning.

The principal encourages staff to focus on test data and use it to improve instruction. Special programs, such as the summer school enrichment program and opportunities for parent/community involvement, complement the efforts. An effort is also under way to increase communication with students, parents, and the community.

Kentwood Public School District, Michigan
Contact: Lois Shepard,(616) 455-4400

In the Reading School District, the elementary mathematics program was revised and restructured to support a performance-based approach. The process began in the 1993-1994 school year when a committee of teachers reviewed the latest research on mathematics instruction and assessment. This information was used as criteria for evaluating textbooks. The district piloted four programs in 1994-1995. Teachers met monthly to evaluate the programs' scope and sequence, presentation design, and correlation to standards the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics had set. In June 1995 the teacher committee, with input from parents and students, made its final selection. The Heath Connections program was adopted and a two-year implementation plan, featuring extensive staff development, followed. The district is using longitudinal achievement studies to assess the program's success.

Reading School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Stella Lemti, (610) 371-5681

The Sacramento K-3 Reading Compact is a joint venture of school districts, universities, reading specialists, and others. It aims to increase reading achievement for all students and to use research-based practices to prevent reading failure. It also seeks to make current reading instruction more compatible with research-based guidelines and ensure consistency for students as they move through the grades or from school to school.

The goal for the Center Joint Unified School District, a new partner in this compact, is for between 85 and 90 percent of its third-graders to read at or above grade level by the year 2000. District test results in spring 1996 (Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills/4) revealed that an average of 41 percent of students read below grade level.

Center Joint Unified School District, California
Contact: Jan Adams, (916) 338-6413

3. Alignment

In the Pinellas County School District, CIAI Design: The Relationship — Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Improvement — is composed of achievement targets; student assessment measures for state, district, and classroom purposes; and best practices instructional strategies. CIAI is continually reviewed for improvement.

At the school level, the Student Achievement Model (SAM) involves the process of aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and improvement to ensure a high-performing teaching and learning system. This process includes scheduled cycles of reviewing student progress based on data and adjusting instruction to help students meet expectations. The review cycles occur at the classroom and school levels.

The CIAI system and SAM process are aligned to accomplish Florida's system of school improvement and accountability requirements and state student performance standards.

Pinellas County School District, Florida
Contact: Judith Westfall, (813) 588-6121; westfall@pinellas.k12.fl.us

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The Poland Central School District prominently displays New York State report cards in its elementary and secondary schools as part of the district's ongoing discussion about program development to meet new state standards and assessments. Curriculum committees in language arts and mathematics as well as science and technology work on improvements, with K-12 teachers leading the effort.

Poland Central School District, New York
Contact: John W. Stewart, (315) 826-0203

In Charleston School District 1, curriculum profiles that cover skills and concepts were prepared for all K-12 subject areas and were aligned with state and national standards. Representatives from every grade traced subject matter concepts and skills from introduction through proficiency and review. Grades K-6 identified the level of expected familiarity for every profile item with I=introduced, D=developed, P=proficiency with required assessment, and R=reviewed. Grades 7-12 expected proficiency in all profile items listed.

The staff met in grade-level meetings at the K-6 level and by subject matter in grades 7-12 to develop the local assessments for all proficiency items. These assessments included forced-choice and performance opportunities. Staff identified the test items, testing criteria, directions, scores, and reporting forms. All teachers must collect this information annually.

Assessments at each K-6 grade level or 7-12 subject matter are analyzed with all staff members present. Recommendations are made for the school improvement plan for the following year or years.

Charleston School District 1, Illinois
Contact: Jeannie Walters, (217) 345-2106; jwalters@charleston.k12.il.us

4. Higher-Order Thinking

A model used in Community High School District 99 in Illinois creates independent learners by teaching critical-thinking strategies in all subjects. Students "learn how to learn" by developing problem-solving, critical-reading, and writing skills.

Implementation begins with intensive staff training on a voluntary basis. Teachers participate in Project CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies), a professional growth program validated by the National Diffusion Network for grades 10 through 12 in 1985. Concepts emphasized include: Students must be able to integrate new information with prior knowledge; students must become actively involved in their own learning; learning occurs when the learner transforms the information in meaningful ways; and students monitor their own progress to identify which strategies are the most effective.

The district provides time for interested teachers to continue to work together to develop curriculum after the initial training. In an effort to support trained staff, reading teachers at both campuses are released from study hall duties to serve as facilitators. They work with subject area teachers to create lesson plans, design curriculum, and select appropriate textbooks. The district's strategic learning facilitator, a reading specialist trained and certified by Project CRISS, coordinates efforts.

Standardized tests and local assessments evaluate the program. To overcome the perception that only English or reading staff can teach students to be strategic learners, teachers from other area high schools, as well as nationally known consultants, conduct workshops and in-service training.

Community High School District 99, Illinois
Contact: Maureen Dombrowski, (630) 271-6607; mdombro@csd99.k12.il.us

5. School Models

The Cincinnati Public Schools had adopted three models from New American Schools, which offers communities choices among tested models for school improvement. The three in use in Cincinnati include:

- Co-NECT Schools, organized around small, multigrade clusters of students taught by a cross-disciplinary team. Most students stay in the same cluster, with the same teachers, for at least two years.
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, a comprehensive school design for grades K-12 based on 10 design principles that grow in large part out of the experience of Outward Bound, which educator Kurt Hahn founded in 1941. These design principles require greater continuity of relationships between students and teachers, drawing on the power of small groups and creating a more in-depth and focused curriculum. They also encourage building strategic links between school and community.

- Roots and Wings, a comprehensive restructuring of education for children from birth to age 11. The goal of Roots and Wings is to ensure every child a firm foundation in the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's world and to go far beyond to higher-order learning and integration of knowledge. Roots refers to strategies designed to ensure that every child can meet world-class standards — early intervention for at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; research-based curriculum with extensive training support; one-on-one tutoring for children struggling with reading; integrated health, mental health, and social services; and family support. Wings refers to improvements in curriculum and instruction designed to let children soar.

Cincinnati City School District, Ohio
Contact: Kathleen Ware, (513) 475-4803; warekat@edub.cpsboe.k12.oh.us

ENVIRONMENT

1. Teacher Development

Yellow Medicine East School District has an extensive staff development and curriculum development/change practice, and it uses technology to incorporate graduation-standard teaching. Designated as a Center for School Change district, the district also uses Reading Recovery and is in the process of developing new programs with higher education institutions.

Yellow Medicine East, Minnesota
Contact: Bob Vaadeland, (320) 564-4081; bobva@yme.k12.mn.us

In Hillsboro School District 3, teachers from various disciplines and grade levels met to consider the subject of professional development. As a result of this meeting, they went on to develop an organizational structure for professional development and launched a professional development council. That council includes certified district personnel representing various school levels as well as the fundamental learning areas of language arts, social studies, mathematics, biological and physical sciences, fine arts, and physical development and health. Noncertified staff, administrators, and parents also take part. The council will assess, coordinate, and evaluate staff development in the district.

Hillsboro School District 3, Illinois
Contact: Earl Meier, (217) 532-2942; emeier@montgomery.k12.il.us

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La Porte Independent School District received an Academics 2000 grant that enabled the establishment of a staff development model similar to that used in Reading Recovery. Specifically, over three years, all administrators, prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first and second-grade teachers have been trained using Frameworks (a literacy approach) and other materials. These provide research on teaching and learning, often with practical applications. Groups meet for three hours every other week for one year, during their hours of employment. Substitutes fill in for teachers. This approach has replaced many of the "one-shot" staff development sessions that often have no lasting effect.

La Porte Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Linda Pitre, (281) 842-2552

A six-week course is offered to new teachers in Kelso School District 458. Presentations and seminars are conducted every two weeks for one and a half hours covering topics that include special education referral practices, Washington State essential learnings, parent conferences, discipline, classroom management, and research-based teaching practices. Principals and district office directors present the material.

Kelso School District 458, Washington
Contact: Yvonne Ryans, (360) 577-2443; yryans@kalama.com

Staff development was provided for all mathematics teachers in the Southwest Independent School District in 1995-1996. Elementary teachers attended Math Their Way (K-2) and Math Their Way of Thinking (3-5), from the Center for Innovation, for one week in the summer. Middle school teachers attended Math Achievement through Problem Solving (MAPS) from Purdue University, which uses a hands-on approach. The district's director of secondary education also meets weekly with middle school academic teams to support this model. The director of elementary education meets periodically with teachers.

Southwest Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Iris Amon, (210) 622-9550; irisamon@the.expressnews.net

2. Early Childhood Education Programs

In the Evansville-Vanderburgh School District, parents of children ages 3 through 5 who show disability in hearing, thinking, talking, seeing, or moving may contact the Evansville Early Childhood Education Office for free evaluation and services, including an individualized education plan. The philosophy of the program is simple: Early intervention increases the chances for academic success. Services are provided at most preschool/day-care agencies in the district, and all special education programs for school-age children are available to preschoolers.

Evansville-Vanderburgh School District, Indiana
Contact: Phillip Schoffstall, (812) 435-8477; pschoffs@evsc.k12.in.us

Suffolk City School District's program for 4-year-olds incorporates the High/Scope Developmental approach and the Creative Curriculum approach, which assume that young children learn through interaction with their environment. The curriculum provides experiences that meet young children's needs and that stimulate physical, emotional, and intellectual development. The preschool program will include 191 students in 12 classrooms with a teacher and assistant in each. A comprehensive program of in-service activities also has been conducted.

The High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR) is used to assess student programs and to study program evaluation. This assessment is based on observation of the child's behaviors and activities in initiative, social relations, creative representation, music and movement, language and literacy, and logic and mathematics.

Suffolk City School District, Virginia
Contact: Jacquelin Marshall, (757) 925-5500

Success for All is a schoolwide restructuring program intended to help students succeed in the early grades and continue their progress through the elementary years. Available nationally, it is also used in the Dade County Schools. Effective approaches include research-based preschool; whole-day kindergarten; beginning reading programs for 90 minutes per day; homogenous reading groups; one-on-one tutoring; cooperative learning approaches to intermediate reading, writing/language arts, and mathematics; family support services; and a part-time or full-time project facilitator. The goal of keeping students performing on grade level minimizes retention and avoids dependence on long-term special services such as special education.

Dade County School District, Florida
Contact: Nerida Santa-Cruz, (305) 995-2367; santacru@DCPS.dade.k12.fl.us

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A grant-funded prekindergarten program in the Clifton Fine Central School District represents this impoverished rural community's only opportunity for badly needed early intervention and preschool services.

Goals for the 1996-1997 school year enhanced the program's ability to ensure that all children met the standards of the New York State department of education. Among the activities were socialization games; conflict resolution; readiness skills; reading appreciation; communication and language development; and weekly themes to integrate learning and to develop motor skills. Other classrooms and students were integrated into the prekindergarten classroom.

Prekindergarten staff participated in workshops throughout the school year and met weekly to discuss program goals, student performance, and other issues. Parents also attended bimonthly advisory committee meetings. This program enjoys enthusiastic community support. Prekindergarten children exhibit a noted difference in social, motor, and cognitive development as they move to kindergarten.

Clifton Fine Central School District, New York
Contact: Gail Gotham, (315) 848-3333

3. Remediation Programs

Operation Safety Net supports 44 Dade County elementary schools designated by the state of Florida as "critically low-performing schools." Components include medical screening to provide intervention and prevention; Success for All, a research-based reading program; a technology-rich environment and assessment system (with a computer-to-student ratio of 1:5); and individualized student technology software.

Dade County School District, Florida
Contact: Nerida Santa-Cruz, (305) 995-2367; santacru@DCPS.dade.k12.fl.us

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A program in the High Point Regional High School District combines standardized and local assessment systems with a variety of instructional models that have resulted in the district consistently achieving some of the state's highest passing rates on mandated tests. Instructional strategies range from supplemental enrichment to remedial labs to after-school and lunch period test-prep classes.

High Point Regional High School District, New Jersey
Contact: Robert J. Godfrey, (973) 875-3170

Transition classes are offered on four elementary campuses in the Nederland Independent School District. Eligible first-grade students are served in a full-day program while second and third-grade students attend a half-day program. For up to one year, transition classes provide a developmentally appropriate program of accelerated instruction for all students, using special instructional technology, individualized instruction, and reduced class size. Students who are perceptually immature or significantly younger than their classmates and unable to demonstrate appropriate grade-level skills are eligible for the classes. The program, which parents endorse, produces excellent results. Funds from Title I and the district support it.

Nederland Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Joyce Russell, (409) 724-2391

In the Arlington Public Schools, Project GO strives to improve the achievement of African-American students in language arts and mathematics. For the past three years, the project has served targeted students in the third and fourth grades, and results have indicated that Project GO students experience greater-than-average growth in all areas, as demonstrated by their increased Iowa test scores. Among the aspects of Project GO that may have contributed to student growth: individualized services; standardized and informal assessments; constant monitoring; teacher collaboration; close ties to regular activities; parental contacts; and staff development.

Project GO services are now provided to targeted second and third-graders in seven elementary schools.

Arlington Public School District, Virginia
Contact: Shelia Mingo, (703) 358-6125

After a six-year effort, Reading Recovery, an early intervention program, has been fully implemented in 27 elementary schools in the Newport News Public Schools. Sixty-seven trained teachers have provided complete programs for 814 children in the past three years. Success can be measured in the number of children returned to their first-grade classrooms reading at or above grade level and in a reduction in the number of learning disabled classes in the district. (The district currently requires 17 fewer learning disabled classes than when this effort began.)

Newport News Public Schools, Virginia
Contact: Beth Check, (757) 591-4575; bcheck@nnadmin.sbo.nn.k12.va.us

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The best way to break the cycle of reading failure is to provide remediation as early as possible. The Early Intervention in Reading (EIR) model, developed in the Abington School District, is based on the work of Barbara Jackson and her research team at the University of Minnesota. It involves a four-day teaching cycle for at-risk readers in first and second grade. Half-hour lessons with small groups of students include story introduction, word analysis skills, reading strategies, and writing dictation. On the fifth day, a running record of students' reading is conducted.

EIR, which is provided in addition to regular reading instruction, is taught the first four to six weeks of school by the building reading consultant. Then the classroom teacher takes over. Assessments indicate student improvement in concepts of print, phonemic awareness, sound/letter relationships, word recognition, and comprehension.

Abington School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Sue Ann Miller, (215) 881-2513

The Early Literacy Learning Initiative (ELLI) is a Title I schoolwide program in the Mansfield City School District. A literacy coordinator, trained through Ohio State University's ELLI, works daily with students and staff to implement a framework for literacy lessons in K-5 classrooms. The coordinator teaches small groups of children for half the day; during the other half, the coordinator observes, demonstrates, and holds conferences with individual teachers.

Kindergarten through second-grade teachers have participated in ELLI for three years. Performance levels of all children are consistently higher than in previous years on Reading Recovery observation tasks and other measures. Third through fifth-grade teachers are working with the literacy coordinator to implement literacy lessons in the intermediate grades.

Mansfield City School District, Ohio
Contact: Joyce Adair, (419) 525-6449

Grand Prairie Independent School District guarantees that all students will become successful readers and writers. It has even provided additional staffing at all elementary schools to achieve that goal. Besides quality classroom instruction in literacy, all elementary schools have trained Reading Recovery, Reading Support, and Academic Development teachers who provide intensive instruction for young children who find learning to read and write difficult.

During a Reading Recovery lesson, first-graders are engaged in using effective strategies to decode text and begin to write. In Reading Support, intermediate-grade readers and writers work in small groups to improve reading fluency and develop in-depth comprehension strategies. While attending Academic Development classes conducted by special education teachers, students participate in a variety of learning experiences based on their needs. Professional development for teachers of these special classes is intense. Experts from the district and nearby universities work regularly with these teachers as they become learners of what is most effective in the teaching of reading and writing.

Grand Prairie Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Judith Gasser, (972) 237-4021; judy.gasser@gpisd.org

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4. Technology

Planning for the introduction and expansion of technology in the Bellevue Public Schools included members of the professional and classified staff and community members. Believing that technology is useless without (1) well-defined curriculum integration activities and (2) a relevant staff-development program, curriculum committees use information gathered from teachers, parents, and students to determine what is needed for the most effective use of technology in a particular subject area while maintaining the integrity of the system. The district staff development component is implemented by four certified staff members who devote all of their time to providing classroom demonstration lessons; conducting individual, building, and district workshops; writing software application guides; and developing lessons that use available technology as a basis for the instruction/learning process.

Mathematics was the first subject area focused upon for technology integration. The mathematics curriculum committee reviewed and selected software to integrate with the developed curriculum and supporting materials. In addition, to prepare for technology use in the mathematics curriculum, the instructional staff received two and one-half days of staff development activities, the first of which was devoted to learning about the technology and the second of which concentrated on curriculum integration. A half-day follow-up provided a software exploratory session. Standardized test scores show that mathematics scores increased significantly immediately following the use of technology to assist in the teaching of mathematics. Since that initial mathematics implementation, English/language arts, reading, science, business education, industrial technology, music, physical education, special education, and social studies curricula have been the focus of staff development.

Bellevue Public Schools, Nebraska
Contact: Larry Wade, larwade@ne.uswest.net, or Gene Wright, gwright@ne.uswest.net

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The framework for the restructuring of the Lake Orion Community Schools originated with its five-year technology plan, which community members, educators, and students hoped would be a working model of the environment the district envisioned for its instructional community.

As part of that plan, all technology-based tools purchased for instructional, administrative and professional use are accompanied by training. Further, a competency checklist for teachers was designed to be both an assessment and a learning tool. If teachers are not able to demonstrate competency in the use of the computer, individual and small group workshops are held to ensure that every teacher is competent in using the teacher workstation in the classroom. In addition, each school is able to decide how to use its technology resources, and selected expert teachers and novice teachers are provided release time to work together to increase both personal technology skills and the integration of technology into the curriculum. Since the introduction of the latter program in April 1997, more than 50 mentor sessions have been held.

A districtwide purchase policy for software and courseware also has been implemented, and curriculum integration has become the primary consideration in that selection. Further, curriculum projects at all grade levels involve Internet resources, video resources (such as videodiscs, satellite, cable, and video), and computer resources (such as integrated learning systems, CD-ROM, and networked programs). The district also uses technology for its administrative functions.

Lake Orion Community Schools, Michigan
Contact: Linda Glowaz; lglowaz@lakeorion.k12.mi.us

Examples of the teaching and learning improvements based upon the use of computers are many in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). More than 150 Algebra 1 teachers now use laptop computers, large-screen TV/monitor, classroom connections to the World Wide Web based on fast T1 lines, and their own websites and the Algebra Forum to improve their delivery of instruction. The district's science technology project placed computers and projection devices in each elementary and secondary school and provided teacher training in the use of multimedia science applications. The high school writing project placed 30 low-cost word processors in each high school and trained teachers to use them while teaching about the writing process. The previous three topics are covered in separate television shows in the Computing Classroom series, which is produced by HISD and aired on its cable channel. The district's reading project places Accelerated Reader in each middle school, and the K-3 Reading Technology project provides two computers, a large-screen TV/monitor, and 30 reading software packages in each of 183 elementary schools. That project was extended this year to include Accelerated Reader in the fourth and fifth grades in every elementary school.

Two innovative training projects are the advanced technology training institutes, which are held over the summer and which provide 200 teachers and librarians and instructional supervisors, already skilled in the use of technology, with advanced training in areas such as multimedia production and applications, and Internet research. Each year, the district also sends approximately 100 outstanding technology teachers to attend all three days of the Texas Computer Education Association Annual Conference. This conference is seen as a great training opportunity, and teachers apply what they have learned immediately. The district's schools have a variety of innovative technology projects in place ranging from cooperative preservice teacher training arrangements with local colleges of education to literary journals and weather projects on the Internet.

HISD uses technology for administrative applications as well. Projects range from new financial packages to the management of technical support (with a modern Technical Support Center). The district network manages student data.

Houston Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Daryl Ann Borel, (713) 892-6222

Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, Ill., uses technology to support the district's mission and vision of producing world-class learners by building a connected learning community.

Every school in the district has been renovated or rebuilt to fulfill this vision. Discover 15, a school-bus-turned-space-shuttle, offers enriched math and science instruction and an extraordinary example of high-level technology partnership between business and education. Staff development programs include the teacher-buy program that exchanges teacher training time for computers. Many of those teachers now teach others from abroad and in other parts of the United States.

Woven throughout the district are examples of the equipment and applications that enhance learning and efficiency. Video distribution systems and production studios are commonplace.

Behind the scenes, information management systems are deployed for the district's fixed-asset accounting and Illinois fund accounting, grant management, and bus routing. Students even use computerized cards to track their lunch accounts.

At the same time, School District 15's definition of "learner" extends well beyond its K-8 students. Its award-winning senior exchange program involves the community's older residents and its youngest learners. The district office also hosts SeniorNet, a computer training program used by more than 250 seniors each week. Producing world-class learners by building a connected learning community is a 21st Century mission and vision.

Community Consolidated School District 15, Palatine, Illinois
Contact: John G. Conyers, conyers@esc.ccsd15.k12.il.us

Using effective blends of good instructional practice and good technology, Evergreen School District has forever changed its teaching and learning. The Internet, Electric Library, and CD-ROM references are available through every computer in the district. Integrating technology with project-based learning engages students and demands the use of complex, higher-level thinking skills. The district has equipped, staffed, and provided extensive training for 20 high-technology classrooms, funded from a combination of local, state, and federal sources. Instructional technology leaders have produced a CD-ROM of curriculum integration units that has been distributed throughout the district. Ongoing staff development workshops emphasize curriculum integration, and every school has created its own web page and used this technology as a tool to provide students with an audience for authentic publication.

The district's vision of instructional technology encompasses the full range of teaching and learning tools such as digital cameras, classroom projection devices, scanners, adaptive equipment for learners with disabilities, networking, video technology, robotics, electronic learning resources, and additional technologies supporting specific subject areas. This range of equipment has led to development of several unique programs. Three evenings per week during the school year, a live 90-minute homework assistance television program is broadcast throughout the metropolitan area on a local TCI cable channel.

Every elementary school has a Music In Education (MIE) lab for teaching music theory, musicianship, and performance, and two junior high schools have a technology-based career awareness and exploration curriculum that allows students to learn about a variety of high-tech occupations. Both high schools also have well-equipped labs for teaching computer aided drafting (CAD) and computer-assisted manufacturing (CAM). Graduates of these classes develop entry-level skills for immediate employment or for advanced training. Evergreen also hosts the Clark County Vocational Skills Center, winner of a national award for its innovative curriculum, integration of technology, and use of school-business partnerships. Technology classes include CIM (computer integrated manufacturing), electro-digital technology, and legal/technical office practices. Select high schools students are trained and paid to provide technical support and assist with training throughout the district.

Evergreen School District 114, Washington
Contact: Richard T. Melching, rmelchin@egreen.wednet.edu

The Evesham Township Public School District began to integrate technology into its curriculum in 1986 when the district piloted the IBM Writing to Read program in one kindergarten, then adopted it the following year for all kindergartens. Today, all special education classes use computers as part of their regular program, and a special program called "Skills for Independent Learning" provides intense keyboarding practice for all students identified as perceptually impaired. These students, who traditionally have difficulty writing legibly, are able to type notes and reports on a computer. Started on Apple IIe's and then used on IBM Model 25's, this program runs today on a network.

Other examples of technology integration are apparent. Fifth-grade students build simple machines using Legos as part of their science curriculum and program these machines using Lego Logo. And in middle school, computer technology is integrated in almost all academic areas as well as related arts. Students use word processing and desktop publishing to write reports and Hyperstudio to make presentations that include scanned pictures as well as video and sound clips. The industrial technology program heavily emphasizes computer technology and is a model site in New Jersey.

Elementary students are combining their computer skills with community service through computer service clubs that offer services such as installing software to school staff, and middle school students program school announcements and edit videotape as part of their participation in audiovisual clubs. Middle school students also volunteer their time to help the senior citizens at workshops and helped during the community technology conference.

The district is also integrating the Internet into classroom instruction.

Evesham Township Public School District
Contact: Elaine Daniele, danielee@evesham.k12.nj.us

5. Class Size

Small class size, high-quality teachers, a low turnover rate among staff, and good communication among staff members — these are the factors that have contributed to the academic accomplishments at the Nursery Elementary campus in the Nursery Independent School District. Indeed, the campus has focused on doing many small things right and well to improve achievement. In the fourth and fifth grades, for example, teachers have the students for a two-year block of time, as one teacher does a language arts block and the other does the math/science block for both grades. Teachers, therefore, know the students' strengths and weaknesses. Parental involvement is also encouraged by giving parents specific tasks.

Nursery Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Linda Lockhart, (512) 575-6882

In the Wilkes County School District, parallel block scheduling has raised student achievement by providing time for individualized directed-reading instruction. This approach to scheduling provides a 12:1 student-teacher ratio each day for students when they receive direct reading and mathematics instruction. These smaller class sizes have made it possible for students to achieve higher expectations. The gap narrows between readers and nonreaders.

Professional development is also key, and teachers in grades two through five meet monthly to discuss strategies, classroom management, assessment, and diagnosis.

Wilkes County School District, Georgia
Contact: Jim Parker, (706) 678-2718; argus@g-net.net

6. Student Health and Social Needs

Comprehensive School Health is a new program to promote individual health in the Marshall County School District. Each school has between three and five short-term objectives for 1997-1998 with activities, time lines, and evaluation methods.

Marshall County School District, Alabama
Contact: Richard Ferguson, (205) 582-3171

Students in the Tippecanoe Valley School District have many chances to learn about negative peer influences, peer pressure, and positive behaviors thanks to the district's commitment to social learning skills. The district uses Developing Understanding of Self and Others in grades K-1; Quest in grades K-5; and DARE in grade 5. Counseling support is also provided for kindergarten through fifth-graders, and social skills training by means of conflict resolution for peers is available through the counselor and special services teacher.

In addition, all K-5 teachers incorporate strategies in daily behavior management into their classes, with the nurse, school counselor, and special services teacher providing support. Funding comes from At-Risk and Drug-Free Schools grants, plus general funds.

Tippecanoe Valley School District, Indiana
Contact: Counselor, (219) 353-7465

Teachers of K-6 students in the Randolph School District receive training and ongoing support to implement the Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Curriculum of the Stone Center at Wellesley College. Students learn to solve people problems, build positive relationships, and create a supportive classroom environment that appreciates diversity and encourages academic achievement by all.

Randolph School District, Massachusetts
Contact: Nancy Connelly, (617) 961-6211

Peer Assistance and Leadership (PALS) is a student-assistance program that uses student empowerment as the basis for student achievement in the Donna Independent School District. The district began this effective program by implementing dropout prevention at a local middle school. While the first venture was not a shining success, a small group of at-risk students graduated and now attend local institutions of higher learning. The district then expanded this program to the second middle school, where it has proved quite successful. Six years later, the district has added an elementary school for the HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) program as part of our efforts. These programs are implemented weekly while other programs take place monthly or once a semester. PALS travels to local elementary schools performing puppet shows and skits for drug education and red ribbon week; the program also includes a community-service component.

Students involved in PALS also volunteer to work with special needs students. A goals is to help these students become more social at the campus level. Tutoring and mediation are also part of PALS.

Donna Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Marilu Navarro, Debbie and Fred Zambrano, Valentine Guerrero
(956) 464-6003; mlnav@aol.com

The Evansville-Vanderburgh School District offers an alternative transitional program for middle school students who have exhibited behavior problems and who have difficulty functioning in traditional schools; this program provides an individualized curriculum under the direction of a team of teachers. In addition, an alternative high school attempts to provide conflict resolution and behavioral support while enhancing students' reading, language, math, and vocational skills, and an enrichment center serves potential high school dropouts who pose no discipline problems.

Evansville-Vanderburgh School District, Indiana
Contact: Phillip Schoffstall, (812) 435-8477; pschoffs@evsc.k12.in.us

7. Other Programs for Students

The Incubator Scientists Program (ISP) is a precollegiate science program that encourages inner-city students to pursue careers in science, mathematics, and engineering, and that helps these students develop problem-solving skills in a scientific manner.

One component of the program, which includes mostly freshmen and sophomores, focuses on scientific awareness and literacy. Another — the Incubator Scientists Society — consists mostly of juniors and seniors and provides mentoring for motivated students. The Teaching-Instructional Component involves seminars and workshops for science and mathematics teachers. This popular program continues to expand into more high schools and middle schools.

St. Louis City School District, Missouri
Contact: Edward Haynie, (314) 863-7266

The ACE (All Children Excel) program in the Davenport Community School District focuses on teaching strategies and programs designed to ensure that minority students attain the highest learning goals possible. With the help of a consultant from a Chicago law firm specializing in school equity, a district-community team analyzed student achievement, student participation and placement, and building enrollment. Seven priorities emerged that have been identified as ACE frameworks: affirmative action and hiring; extracurricular activities; school climate and culture; special education; student achievement outcomes; student assignment; and student discipline. The district's equity director reports monthly to the school board.

Davenport Community School District, Iowa
Contact: Jane Grady, (319) 336-5060; dr_jane_grady@qmail.aea9.k-12.ia.us

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Elementary school students in the Abington School District benefit from a comprehensive mathematics curriculum. Using a K-6 research-based curriculum developed with support from the National Science Foundation, elementary students also have access to a mathematics assistance program, an elementary curriculum mathematics specialist, and computer software. In addition, there is an enrichment component based upon the international mathematical Olympiad for elementary schools plus provisions for mathematically talented students to accelerate within the sequence. The curriculum also prepares students to demonstrate high achievement on standardized tests, in statewide assessments, and in competitions.

Abington School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Ann Bacon, (215) 881-2514; Annbacon@aol.com

The Eagles' Nest Program, offered by West Virginia's Regional Educational Service Agency II, trains high school students to become mentors for elementary and middle school students, helping them with goal-setting, self-discipline, self-motivation, conflict management, career planning, the dangers of drug abuse, and other issues. Approximately 4,000 students in eight counties participate in the program, which has been a cooperative effort involving the regional agency, the Governor's Drug-Free Communities program, and various businesses and local boards of education.

The overarching goal is to encourage talented Appalachian youngsters to develop their potential and contribute to their home state.

Regional Educational Service Agency II, West Virginia
Contact: Barbara Maynard, (304) 529-6205; bmaynard@access.k12.wv.us

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Kindergarten and first-grade students can attend class together in the Giddings Independent School District. Parents request admission to the mixed class, and selection takes place in June for the following year. For those in the multiage class, time for learning classroom procedures is cut in half, because each kindergartner has a first-grade mentor. Kindergartners in the class also are able to create word problems by Christmas, and many are reading by this time. Cooperative learning and reading stations provide the successful instructional models for this type of grouping.

Giddings Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Linda Bettin, (409) 542-2854; lbettin@giddings.txed.net

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When new state standards called for inquiry-based teaching, the Livingston Parish School District received grants and local monies to purchase programs and equipment to help classroom teachers implement the new curriculum. One such program is Developmental Approaches in Science, Health, and Technology (DASH), a K-6 product from the University of Hawaii. In DASH, students learn content and skills through activities that use kinesthetic, visual, linguistic, and mathematical modes of learning.

Livingston Parish School District, Louisiana
Contact: Vickie Hinson, (504) 686-7044

The Key Scholars program began in the 1988-1989 school year as an effort to increase the number of National Merit Scholars in the Hillsborough County Public Schools. The goal was expanded to assist more students to broaden their post-secondary options. Procedures were implemented to increase scores on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

In the future, emphasis also will be placed on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Program (ACT). Students will be encouraged to read more and to attempt more rigorous courses.

Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida
Contact: Dorothy Carregal, (813) 272-4971

The Birdville Independent School District created an educational environment similar to some highly regarded private schools by transforming two elementary schools into "academies" for the 1997-1998 school year. Specially selected staff members met periodically during 1996-1997 to plan for the transformation. During the summer, they learned how the brain develops and functions and explored research-based instructional strategies. Their work paid off. Besides regular programs, the academies offer full-day kindergarten, expanded instruction in fine arts, multiple language instruction, and enhanced technology. Students wear uniforms and are held to high standards of behavior and academic performance, which parents are expected to help maintain. Extended-day tuition-funded enrichment programs bring a variety of learning opportunities to students after normal school hours. Assessment data will determine if the additional cost of the academies is warranted.

Birdville Independent School District, Texas
Contact: David Foerch, (817) 831-5700

ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Assessment

The assessment system used in the Ames Community School District benefits all learners. Its seven principles are: (1) accountability — the concept that all students will meet standards; (2) flexibility — differential learning rates are accommodated by offering assessments over groups of grades rather than at rigid grade levels exclusively; (3) standards based — focus on high but achievable targets and precise curriculum content expectations; (4) anchored — linked to measures stakeholders view as valid; (5) ongoing — a continuous process that provides student-performance data to teachers and students in "real time"; (6) disaggregated — student test data are the basis for improvement planning; and (7) transition focus — students, teachers, and parents are informed about the knowledge and skills required for success at the next level.

Ames Community School District, Iowa
Contact: Michael Avise, (515) 239-3700; mavise@email.ames.k12.ia.us

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Several years ago, the Albion Central School District purchased a powerful instructional management system, ABACUS. The K-6 math and English curricula reside in this system, which provides an individual, easily grasped, record of each child's performance. The system also is aligned with MCAD (Model Curriculum Assessment Data Base), which teachers use to create sophisticated assessments.

Albion Central School District, New York
Contact: Ada Grabowski, (716) 589-2056; Ada_Grabowski@Albn.WNYRIC.org

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A compact collection of material, the testing resource kit used in the Pickens County School District helps teachers who might be reluctant to search through school office files for student test data. The kit, which the district's curriculum department created, contains templates that show students' strengths and weaknesses in a concise, non-threatening format, plus other materials. Extensive staff training ensures that everyone knows how to use this resource.

The district also uses the PSAT to help students select high school courses that will address their weaknesses and prepare for the SAT. The district buys the summary of answers for each school, and teachers use test results to identify student needs.

Pickens County School District, South Carolina
Contact: Mary Babb, (864) 855-8150; mbabb@district.pickens.k12.sc.us

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Assessment has been an ongoing concern in Maine School Admin. District #48. Seven years ago, the district began its efforts with a standard K-2 writing curriculum and rubric for performance assessment based on teacher training. Since that time, the assessment has progressed from K-2 annually to K-10 three times per year, allowing the district to accurately forecast state and national test results based on local results.

Maine School Admin. District #48, Maine
Contact: Virginia Secor, (207) 368-5091

2. School Accountability

School Effectiveness Measures and Review is a process for assessment, intervention, and support that challenges every school in Seattle School District 1 to improve in at least two areas. It also provides an objective process to select schools to receive additional resources or support to improve achievement.

As part of the process, teachers prepare quarterly reports on academic achievement for the superintendent; in these reports they address standards for reading, writing, and math. The district also wants to identify objective and consistent effectiveness measures for all schools and provide an objective baseline for measuring improvement.

Seattle School District 1, Washington
Contact: Gary Tubbs, (206) 298-7170; gtubbs@cks.ssd.k12.wa.us

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Kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers in Wessington Springs District 36-2 have selected goals and posted them on a single wall for all to see. Working with state content standards, they have also refined these goals. The results have been published for the community.

Wessington Springs District 36-2, South Dakota
Contact: Darold Rounds, (605) 539-9311

Every school in the Bridgeport School District receives annual assessment information, including student outcomes on state and district assessments. In addition, principals and representatives from each school-improvement team meet with the director of evaluation and research at least twice a year to discuss their school's progress. In other words, assessments have become a cornerstone for every school's improvement plan.

Bridgeport School District, Connecticut
Contact: Frances Rabinowitz, (203) 576-7128; benfrnklnedcntr31@snet.net

3. Administrative Accountability

The board of trustees in the La Porte Independent School District sets goals based on student needs, and the superintendent assigns the goals to staff members, who formulate a plan to achieve them. In addition, the staff provides both the superintendent and the board with detailed quarterly reports of progress. With these goals in mind, too, there is a formative evaluation of the superintendent twice a year and a summative evaluation annually. Such measurable goals help everyone focus, and student achievement improves.

La Porte Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Linda Pitre, (281) 842-2552

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4. Teacher Accountability

Among the board of education's biggest responsibilities in the Bethpage Union Free School District is the development of a superlative teaching staff. With that goal in mind, every April the board convenes a special meeting to review staff observations and evaluations of all professional staff members who are eligible for tenure. The superintendent makes recommendations, which are supported by documented observations, evaluations, or a synopsis of the teacher's performance.

An administrator also observes all probationary teachers at least twice a semester and evaluates the teacher semiannually. Part-time teachers who do not have tenure are observed at least once each semester and evaluated annually; tenured teachers have the option of being observed and evaluated by an administrator at least once a year or participating in peer coaching, a personal growth plan, an action research project, or a teacher portfolio.

Bethpage Union Free School District, New York
Contact: Regina Cohn, (516) 733-3803

The Grosse Ile Township School District provides a mentor, in addition to the supervisor, to help probationary teachers develop. Upon obtaining tenure, the teachers then move onto the professional growth track. Staff members and supervisors mutually identify goals, which typically focus upon instructional delivery.

Grosse Ile Township School District, Michigan
Contact: Thomas Brown, (313) 692-8704

5. Student Accountability

Students in the Paradise Independent School District are held strictly accountable for homework. Specifically, they are expected not simply to complete the assignments but to earn a grade of at least 80 percent. Students who fall below this level of performance or fail to complete assignments must correct the problem by the next day or face corrective measures, such as detention.

Paradise Independent School District, Wise County, Texas
Contact: Tommy Robertson, (940) 969-2501

Students in Randolph High School District 2 select projects outside their regular course of study and present those projects to a panel of experienced community members and faculty. Panels grade the project as either pass or re-do. As a requirement for graduation, students also exhibit final reports in the media center for two days and present those reports to a panel for approval as well.

Randolph High School District 2, Vermont
Contact: Edgar Sims, (802) 728-5052; edgars4782@aol.com

The Maranacook Area School System is implementing a developmental education model that will meet the needs of all students through the use of individual learning agreements. All students eventually will have their own agreements that consist of goals they have developed with parents, classroom teachers, and learning center staff. Agreements will be reviewed annually.

Maranacook Area School System/School Union 42, Maine
Contact: Judith McLellan, (207) 685-3336

In the Pinellas County School District, an integrated management system in the classroom engages students as workers in a classroom learning system. The management system focuses on the accomplishment of learning goals that are tied to the school and district achievement goals and to state expectations regarding highest student achievement in a safe learning environment. Teachers and students view performance data as a class as well as individually.

Pinellas County School District, Florida
Contact: Judith Westfall, (813) 588-6121; westfall@pinellas.k12.fl.us

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Fifth and eighth-graders in the Yakima School District must meet standards to be promoted to middle school and high school. Specifically, they must achieve passing grades; attend classes regularly; demonstrate skill in reading, writing, communication, and math; and meet performance standards on criterion-referenced reading, writing, and math tests.

Yakima School District 7, Washington
Contact: Dan Penhallegon, (509) 573-7014

ADVOCACY

1. Community

Four years ago, the Albion Central School District contracted with the International Center for Leadership in Education to help gain input from the community on the skills and knowledge students should have before leaving high school. After extensive community forums, we used the information in a discrepancy analysis of our curriculum. Among the revisions we made as a result of this analysis: All students must take a workplace communications course, and all must complete a career cluster course designed around skills.

Albion Central School District, New York
Contact: Ada Grabowski, (716) 589-2056; Ada_Grabowski@Albn.WNYRIC.org

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A team of 220 people spent 18 months developing the Flint Community School District's vision of small learning communities. Five prototype schools began last fall. Community support is broad, with coalitions of adults supporting each of the district's 25,000 students.

Flint Community School District, Michigan
Contact: Linda Smith, (810) 760-1478

In three years, hundreds of people have helped develop and refine Lake Washington School District 414's curriculum framework, which serves as a guide for determining what world-class students should know and be able to do. The district emphasizes student-centered learning in its use of standards, assessments, strategies, and technologies.

Lake Washington School District 414, Washington
Contact: Cynthia Meilleur, (425) 702-3251; cindy_meilleur@qmserver.lkwash.wednet.edu

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In the Scott County School District, an innovative scholars' program encourages students to select more difficult courses to prepare them for college or the workforce. Community volunteers participate in the program, which, has grown from 11 percent of our graduates to 29 percent.

Scott County School District, Virginia
Contact: Danny Dixon, (540) 386-6118; danny@mounet.com

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2. Parental Involvement

The Greenville County School District has taken a number of steps to involve parents in their children's education. Thirty-six elementary schools, for example, have programs serving 4-year-olds who may have difficulty later in school. In 56 half-day sessions held four days a week, the programs address cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. The High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Curriculum is used in this program with extensive training offered to teachers and assistants.

A family learning component of the programs takes place on Fridays and has been extremely successful; home visits, parenting workshops, and other family activities all support parents in their role as their child's first teacher. The district also offers the nationally validated Parents As Teachers program in 10 locations.

In addition, family literacy programs are offered in ten Title I schools, and parents are encouraged to work toward their GED or upgrade basic skills. Children and parents also participate in activities together.

Greenville County School District, South Carolina
Contact: Rhonda Corley, (864) 241-3192

To involve families as early as possible, the Shelby Public School District distributes plastic tubs containing scissors, crayons, a coloring book, alphabet chart, and other items to every family that has a child entering kindergarten. Families use the materials to prepare for the beginning of a successful school year, and schools plan to build on the activities throughout kindergarten and first grade to encourage parents to work at home with youngsters.

Shelby Public School District, Michigan
Contact: Brenda Petersen, (616) 861-6629

With state assistance, the Monroe County School District offers in-school family resource centers. The centers, which parents themselves staff after receiving training, strive to increase parents' knowledge and confidence. They also seek to strengthen the partnership between parents and schools to better meet the educational needs of children from birth through age 5.

Monroe County School District, West Virginia
Contact: Lyn Guy or Rebecca Allen, (304) 772-3094; lynguy@inetone.net

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An instructional support system in the Easton Area School District identifies at-risk elementary students and provides them with academic, behavioral, communication, and social/emotional support. Instructional support teams work as a gateway to special education, a main channel of support for special education inclusion students, and a means of staff development in instruction, behavior management, and life skills. The teams are at the hub of all services offered in the elementary schools. Members look holistically at the child and collaborate with parents and teachers to create conditions where the child can learn to succeed independently.

Easton Area School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Thomas Kopetskie, (610) 250-2410

Parents felt uneasy about coming to Bladen Lakes Primary School to talk with teachers until teachers developed a plan to involve parents at their convenience rather than the school's. Teachers took the plan to area industries, which have provided time, space, and encouragement. Parents and teachers now work together more closely.

Bladen County School District, North Carolina
Contact: Roland T. McKoy, (910) 588-4606

Compacts between home and school are a work in progress in the Orleans Central Supervisory Union School District. Five of the district's seven schools now have compacts, which encourage parent and community involvement in helping children succeed to the highest academic standard possible. Each compact has five components: parent participation; communication; community; teacher involvement; and monitoring.

In addition, school achievement committees, made up of parents, community members, and school staff, help oversee academics as well as extracurricular activities, such as a turn-off-the-TV week, scavenger hunts, and spaghetti dinners.

Orleans Central Supervisory Union School District, Vermont
Contact: Richard Aubuchon, (802) 754-6945; raubuchon@lakeregionhs.k12.vt.us

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The Mountain Valley Unified district's parent/community center, which was created in 1991 to support parent and community involvement, also provides a place where parents meet, volunteer, get training, share ideas, and support their children in school. A full-time coordinator oversees the program, which is supported with district funds, Title I funds, a Healthy Start grant, and a family/school partnership grant.

Mountain Valley Unified School District, California
Contact: Jan Rafferty, (916) 628-5878; jraffety@tcoe.trinity.k12.ca.us

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The Nederland Independent School District's practical parent education program strengthens families in their efforts to raise children. As part of the program, trained district personnel provide fundamental parenting information and training in a supportive, interactive group setting. There are parenting classes, support networks, a family resource library, information consultations, and outside referral. Title I funds, special education funds, and local district funds help support the effort. Parents of elementary and middle school students participate regularly, as do a significant number of parents from day-care centers, nurseries, and private preschool/early education programs.

Nederland Independent School District, Texas
Contact: Joyce Russell, (409) 724-2391

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3. Partnerships

Putting Children First, a long-term partnership involving the Scott County School District, Tennessee Eastman, and three other school systems in neighboring northeastern Tennessee, has spawned programs that improve student achievement in math, science, communication skills, and technology. It also has resulted in surplus equipment (including computers); a comprehensive, teacher-to-teacher staff development day for more than 2,000 teachers; summer science camps; a substitute teacher program; tours; mentoring and shadowing; a scholar program; discovery kits; and more.

Scott County School District, Virginia
Contact: Danny Dixon, (540) 386-6118; danny@mounet.com

As part of a joint venture involving the Cape May County Technical School District, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Game, and the Stone Harbor Wetlands Institute, students have the opportunity to observe osprey from salt marsh platforms as well as tag the offspring and collect data. They then turn their information over to their two partners in the project.

The program aims to increase the osprey population in southern New Jersey as well as involve students in a cooperative, real-world work experience. Many skills are involved including computer skills, tool handling, map reading, construction skills, data keeping, small boat handling, species identification, and wildlife biology.

Cape May County Technical School District, New Jersey
Contact: Dolores Lawrie-Higgins, (609) 465-2161; dlhiggins@cnt.com

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Through the Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program, the Reading School District receives enough funds to distribute high-quality children's books to students three times a year. More than 50,000 books have been distributed since 1991, and for many children, these books are the first they have owned. Community organizations and industry contribute to local funding necessary to qualify for federal RIF funds.

Reading School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Donald Anticole, (610) 371-5935

In the Asheboro City School District, the Even Start Family Literacy Program strengthens families to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. The program serves two populations of parents: high school dropouts and non-native English speakers. Parents must have children between the ages of 3 and 4.

In this program, parents work on language skills or their GED while their children play and learn concepts they will need in school. During a portion of the day, parents and children play together as well. In addition, parent educators make home visits, bringing activities and information to help parents learn that they are their children's best teachers.

Asheboro City School District, North Carolina
Contact: Janet Means, (910) 672-6636

An early literacy program in the Warren City Schools District helps K-2 classroom teachers and special education teachers make informed instructional decisions based on close observation of children's reading and writing skills. In collaboration with Ohio State University, the district is also a local training site for the university's Early Literacy Learning Initiative (ELLI), an arrangement that provides more opportunities for classroom teachers to view effective teaching, and to be observed and coached.

Warren City Schools District, Ohio
Contact: Bette Steele, (330) 841-2272; steeleb@neomn7.neomin.ohio.gov

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The Newfield Central School District offers high school seniors interested in medicine and related health sciences the opportunity to participate in New Visions: Health Career Explorations. The Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), in cooperation with the Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca, provides an inside look at careers found in hospitals and ancillary facilities. Explorations in the Biological Sciences is designed for college-bound students interested in research and experimentation in the biological sciences and integrates the required senior-year courses of English, government, and economics with advanced concepts in biology. This format provides a rigorous, balanced curriculum and an applied learning approach. The program is offered by the BOCES in cooperation with Cornell University.

Access to College Education (ACE) encourages students to attend college and provides guidance. ACE partners include Cornell University, Cortland College, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College. A variety of vocational education options are provided by VO PRO classes.

Newfield Central School District, New York
Contact: Kathryn Holden, (607) 564-9955; kholden@ocmvm.cnyric.org

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In the York City School District, more than 100 companies and 30 community agencies have enrolled in Project Connections, a unique school-to-work program that teaches students in grades six, seven, and eight to link what they are taught with what business and community partners do. As part of the project, students plan and complete community projects, such as designing a playground to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

York City School District, Pennsylvania
Contact: Mary Young, (717) 845-3571

INFORMATION RESOURCES

The following list of resources on student achievement should give school boards interested in learning more about the topic a good start. It contains sources for data, indicators of student achievement, studies, innovative ideas and programs, and comparisons.

ACHIEVE
1280 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 410
Cambridge, MA 02138
617/496-6300
617/496-6361 (fax)
http://www.achieve.org

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE
1200 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20005
202/326-6400
202/371-9849 (fax)
http://www.aaas.org

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
1230 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3078
202/223-9485
202/775-1824 (fax)
http://aera.net

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
1703 North Beauregard Street
Alexandria, VA 22311-1714
800-933-ASCD (2723) or
703/578-9600
703/575-5400 (fax)
http://www.ascd.org

Council for Basic Education
1319 F Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20004-1152
202/347-4171
202/347-5047 (fax)
http://www.c-b-e.org

Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
202/408-5505
202/408-8072 (fax)
http://www.ccsso.org

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303/299-3600
303/296-8332 (fax)
http://www.ecs.org

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
2550 South Parker Road, Suite 500
Aurora, CO 80014
303/337-0990
303/337-3005 (fax)
http://www.mcrel.org

National Alliance of Business
1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
800/787-2848
202/289-2888
202/289-1303
http://www.nab.com

National Association of State Boards of Education
1012 Cameron Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/684-4000
703/836-2313 (fax)

National Center for Education Statistics (including TIMSS)
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208-5574
202/219-1828
202/219-1736 (fax)
http://www.nces.ed.gov/timss

National Center for Improving Student Learning and Achievement in Mathematics and Science
Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin— Madison
1025 West Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53706
608/265-6240
608/263-3406 (fax)
http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/NCISLA

National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing
University of California at Los Angeles
301 GSE & IS
Box 152206
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1522
310/206-1532
310/825-3883 (fax)
http://www.cresst96.cse.ucla.edu

National Center on Education and the Economy
700 11th Street, NW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20001
202/783-3668
202/783-3672 (fax)
http://www.ncee.org

National Education Goals Panel
1255 22nd Street, Suite 502
Washington, DC 20037
202/724-0015
202/632-0957 (fax)
http://www.negp.gov

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3493
703/838-6722
703/683-7590 (fax)
http://www.nsba.org

National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230
703/306-1234
703/306-0090 (fax)
http://www.nsf.gov

NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS
1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 2710
Arlington, VA 22209-3901
703/908-9500
703/908-0622 (fax)
http://www.naschools.org

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
800/USA-LEARN
202/401-2000
202/401-0689 (fax)
http://www.ed.gov

About NSBA

NSBA's Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Boards Association, working with and through all its Federation Members, is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

NSBA's Shared Vision

NSBA and its Federation Members represent 95,000 local school board members who are dedicated to educating every child to his or her fullest potential. In 1996, Federation leaders came together to forge a plan for increasing student achievement through school board leadership. This effort coalesced into a strategic vision—a vision of the National School Boards Association as a powerful, united, energetic Federation . . . as the premier advocate for public education . . . as an influential force for achieving equity and excellence in public education . . . and as a catalyst for aligning the power of the community on behalf of education.
Underlying this shared vision are certain bedrock convictions:

- belief that effective local school boards can enable all children to reach their potential
- conviction that local governance of public education is a cornerstone of democracy
- belief in the power of local school boards to convene the community around education issues
- conviction that together, local school boards can influence education policy and governance at the state and national levels
- commitment to the principle that through collaboration comes impact
- belief that the strength of local school board leadership arises from the board's capacity to represent the diversity of students and communities

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community—to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 14,772 local school districts that serve more than 46.5 million public school students—approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation.

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership